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*Kieran James*

## **Goodbye Leederville Oval**

**by**

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**English language version**

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### **Author bio**

**Dr Kieran James** is a Senior Lecturer in Accounting at the University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. He was formerly Accounting Professor at University of Fiji from 2013-15. He has published scholarly articles in the following journals: *Accounting Forum*, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *International Journal of Critical Accounting*, *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, *Musicology Australia*, *Pacific Accounting Review*, *Punk & Post Punk*, and *Sporting Traditions*. Alongside his high-school friend Michael “Mike” Blewett, he was co-founder of the West Perth Cheer Squad (WAFL), 1984-86. He is also the founder of the *WAFL Golden Era* website (established 18 December 2011) which has had over 130,000 unique page-views as at 30 October 2017. Kieran is also a regular contributor to the *Say NO to any AFL clubs in the WAFL* Facebook group. He is presently researching Fiji Soccer History 1980-89.

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I would like to thank: Mr. Brian Atkinson (official historian of the West Perth Football Club and the author of *It's a Grand Old Flag*); Michael "Mike" Blewett (co-founder of the WPFC cheer squad 1984-86); John Devaney of *Full Points Footy* website and Full Points Publications; Chris Egan (Australian Society for Sports History Perth chapter member, Perth Glory historian, and Peel Thunder supporter); Professor Lionel Frost (Monash University and editor of *Sporting Traditions*); Dr. Sean Gorman (Curtin University academic and the author of *BrotherBoys*); Professor Chris Hallinan (Monash University); Pave Jusup, Kova, and Sime (MCF hooligan firm at Melbourne Knights Soccer Club); Ben (West Perth cheer squad member 1984-86); Patrick Mirosevich (present-day South Fremantle cheer squad member); Mark Whiting (East Fremantle supporter); posters to the *Lost WAFL* Facebook page; and members of the *Say NO to any AFL clubs in the WAFL* Facebook group.

### **Disclaimer**

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily the same as those of Brian Atkinson; West Perth Football Club (WPFC); West Perth Football Club cheer squad 1984-86 or any of its members; Swan Districts Football Club (SDFC); Australian Football League (AFL); West Coast Eagles Football Club (WCEFC); Western Australian Football Commission (WAFC); Western Australian Football League (WAFL); and / or any of the book's interviewees.

*Kieran James*

### **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my maternal grandfather / Swan Districts' supporter, the late Herbert Arthur Acott (1906-99), who instilled in me a love for Aussie Rules Football and the WAFL over and above loyalty to any one club; to my family Jenny, Anna & Lucky; and to my dear parents Laurie and Eunice.

### **Other Books by the Author**

*Sydney's construction union strategy and immigrant worker issues: a Roman Catholic-Marxist perspective* (with Jenny Leung), Spire Publishing, Toronto, 2010.

### Abstract

This book is my memoir, and details my experiences as co-founder of West Perth Football Club's unofficial cheer squad from 1984 to 1986. Our West Perth Football Club unofficial cheer squad (hardcore support) operated in the Western Australian Football League (WAFL) from 1984-86. The sections about the cheer squad are written by me (co-founder Kieran James) with input and support from the other co-founder Michael "Mike" Blewett. Using Marsh's theory of the "illusion of violence", I link the cheer squad to the academic literature on British soccer hooligans, Italian ultras, and other soccer supporter groups from around the world. The book details "traditional", "hot" support for West Perth Football Club among teenaged supporters from middle-class and working-class backgrounds. The findings conform to Armstrong and Hughson's idea of fluid "post-modern" "neo-tribes" where affiliations are very loose and people can easily adjust their degree of commitment to a group and / or leave the group when their personal priorities change. The book shows how, because of neo-liberal ideologies and the corporatization of football, the new national league (the "expanded VFL" / AFL) relegated the WAFL to a second-tier league in 1987. This move took place over the heads of ordinary football supporters and two WAFL club presidents. Moves to bring the game closer to the people in 1984, such as holding the best-and-fairest award count night at Perth Entertainment Centre, should be seen in this light. The book will allow supporters to relive great teams, great players, and great matches from a wonderful era in WA football.

**KEYWORDS:** *Australian Rules Football; Marxism; Soccer Hooliganism; Sports History; West Perth Football Club; Western Australian Football; Western Australian History.*



**NOTE 1:** An abridged version of this book based on Chapters 1-4 only has been published as a journal article as follows: James, K., "Working-class youth supporters of a decimated football league: The West Perth unofficial cheer squad, 1984-86", *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 31, No. 2, (November) 2014, pp. 51-67. *Sporting Traditions* is the official journal of the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH).

**NOTE 2:** This book was written mostly during calendar year 2011. It has only been updated to take into account changes in factual circumstances between 2011 and 2017. It does not directly address contemporary issues such as the AFL alignment model or the Claremont Oval and Lathlain Park redevelopments.

### **Foreword, by Brian Atkinson**

This is a book with a difference. It recounts primarily the memories and reflections of a then 15-year-old school boy who jointly founded a cheer squad for the West Perth Football Club (WPFC) in 1984 to succeed the previous one that was disbanding. These memories and reflections cover the 1984-1986 period. The nature of social relations within the group is also examined.

The book commences with a review of the extensive literature covering “hooliganism” associated with soccer “cheer groups” in the United Kingdom and Europe in those times and up until the hooligan scene wound itself up in the late-1980s. It examines the intersection between punk rock music and soccer hooliganism.

The author recalls commencing to follow West Perth in 1976 at the age of seven, and describes some of his early memories. The performances of the West Perth team and of many of the players from 1984 to 1986 are then recounted. Readers will enjoy recalling many team and individual highlights from that period in particular. Some interesting exchanges with cheer squads from the other Western Australian Football League (WAFL) clubs are described.

This book will appeal to WAFL traditionalists who mourn the demise of the then elite suburban based tribal football competitions, as they were, within the states. The author expresses some very strong views about the evolution of the national Australian Football League (AFL) competition in 1987, and the impact that the creation of the West Coast Eagles, and subsequently the Fremantle Dockers, had on the WAFL competition. He deplores the corporatization of football. He has similarly strong views on the relocation of the West Perth Football Club from Leederville Oval to Arena Joondalup in 1994. These developments impacted heavily on his enthusiasm for football.

The book will assist to preserve the memories and part of the history of the transition period of the middle- and late-1980s when Australian Rules Football was changed forever, and the impact that this change had on the WAFL.

This book is very well researched, extensively referenced, and very well written. It will create controversy amongst readers. Many will strongly agree with the views of the author. Many will strongly disagree.

*Kieran James*

But all West Perth supporters will enjoy their recollections of the players and the times of the mid-1980s.

Mr. Brian A. Atkinson,

West Perth FC official historian,

Perth, 19 November 2011.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*“Although Australian Rules is often referred to as ‘the people’s game’, on account of its broad popularity and appeal, most writings on the history of football pay insufficient attention to individual people, and the stories they tell often lack a human face” (Lionel Frost, Immortals, 2005, p. x).*

This book is my memoir, and details my experiences as co-founder of West Perth Football Club’s unofficial cheer squad from 1984 to 1986.<sup>1</sup> West Perth (WPFC) is one of the leading clubs in the Western Australian Football League (WAFL) competition which is generally regarded today as the third best and most senior Australian Rules football (hereafter “Australian Rules”) competition in Australia.<sup>2</sup> The book describes the experience of being a vital member of this 15 to 20-person unofficial grouping of teenagers aged from 8 years to 18 years which sat behind the northern or Technical School end of the ground at West Perth’s home stadium, Leederville Oval, from 1984 to 1986. It is an important part of Western Australian social history as I was part of the final generation to grow up in the pre-West Coast Eagles era (I turned 18-years-old in 1986) when the WAFL was experiencing its glory years.<sup>3</sup> The West Coast Eagles FC joined the new national competition<sup>4</sup>, known as the “expanded VFL competition” from 1987-89 and the Australian Football League (AFL) from 1990 onwards. This event forever changed the position of the WAFL which was immediately relegated to being a second-tier league.<sup>5</sup> Average WAFL attendances of around 8,000 per game in 1986 dropped to around 4,000 per game in the first year of the expanded VFL competition (1987). Attendances dropped further still to

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<sup>1</sup> A cheer squad is a semi-organized group of hardcore supporters (typically teenagers) which sits in the same strategic place at home games and which supports the team through chants, songs, flags, and banners. Cheryl Critchley documents that the first Australian Rules cheer squad was formed at VFL/AFL club Richmond in 1959. Critchley, C. (2010), *Our Footy: Real Fans vs Big Bucks* (Melbourne: Wilkinson Publishing), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Since the entry of Swan Districts into the WAFL in 1934 the only new club to enter the league has been Peel Thunder in 1997, which increased the total number of WAFL clubs from eight to nine.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding Perth Glory soccer supporters, as opposed to Australian Rules’ supporters in Perth, see Brabazon, T. (1998), “What’s the story Morning Glory? Perth Glory and the imagining of Englishness”, *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 53-66.

<sup>4</sup> Frost, L. (2005), *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules* (Melbourne: John Wiley & Sons), p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

around 2,000 per game in 1995 when Fremantle Dockers became Western Australia's second national-league AFL club. This book compares our group with both the limited literature on Victorian Australian Rules cheer squads and the extensive literature on British soccer hooligans, Italian ultras, and other hardcore soccer supporter groups from around the world.

Early writers in soccer hooligan studies used a Marxist approach (Ian Taylor) or a largely functionalist figurational approach based on hooligan firms as an “*uncivilized* rump” in an otherwise civilized society (Eric Dunning and the Leicester University group of scholars).<sup>6</sup> The academic hooligan literature has been strongly influenced recently by the “anthropological approach” which has challenged the position occupied by the Leicester University School. Leading works using the anthropological approach are Gary Armstrong’s ethnographic study of Sheffield United’s Blades hooligan firm and an Australian study by John Hughson on the Croatian-Australian Bad Blue Boys (BBB) which used to follow Sydney United in Australia’s former National Soccer League (NSL) (1977-2004).<sup>7</sup> The Croatian community’s sister ex-NSL clubs, Melbourne Knights and Sydney United, have ultra-style supporters operating, to a large extent, in the traditions and ethos of the Croatian and Italian ultras whilst also being influenced by English hooligans.<sup>8</sup> Southern and Eastern European ultras groups, historically, have been more organized, more carefully political, more likely to be accepted as a stakeholder group by the club, and more focused on the visual than the typical English hooligan firm. In this regard, France is an interesting case

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<sup>6</sup> Hughson, J. (2002), “Australian soccer’s ‘ethnic tribes’: a new case for the carnivalesque”, in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), p. 41, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, G. (1998), *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score*, paperback edition (Oxford: Berg); Hughson, J. (1997a), “Football, folk dancing and fascism: diversity and difference in multicultural Australia”, *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 167-86; Hughson, J. (1997b), “The Bad Blue Boys and the ‘magical recovery’ of John Clarke”, in Armstrong, G. and Giulianotti, R. (Eds.), *Entering the Field: New Perspectives on World Football* (London and New York: Berg), Chapter 12, pp. 239-59; Hughson, J. (1999), “A tale of two tribes: expressive fandom in Australian soccer’s A-league”, *Sport in Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 10-30; Hughson, J. (2000), “The boys are back in town: soccer support and the social reproduction of masculinity”, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 8-23; Hughson, “Australian soccer’s ‘ethnic tribes’”.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s group interview with Pave Jusup, Kova, and Sime of MCF hooligan firm at Melbourne Knights, Sunshine North, 11 January 2011; Mignon, P. (2002), “Another side to French exceptionalism: football without hooligans?” in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), pp. 62-74; Roversi, A. and Balestri, C. (2002), “Italian ultras today: change or decline?” in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), pp. 131-42.

since it is dominated by English-style hooligans in the north and by Italian-style ultras in the south.<sup>9</sup> We now see ultras-style groups emerging in Scotland such as Green Brigade (Celtic) (formed 2006); Motherwell Ultras; and even at League Two (fourth-tier) newcomers Edinburgh City.

Although our West Perth group never used physical violence, and only once was seriously threatened by it (at Bassendean Oval, the home of Swan Districts Football Club), the football hooligan anthropological literature emphasizes the importance of an “illusion of violence”<sup>10</sup> even when actual violence does not occur. It defines the hooligan “firm”, a class-for-itself to use the term usually attributed (incorrectly) to Karl Marx, in terms of a weekly ritual performance of heterosexual masculinity where a group of hardcore fans defends its physical turf and the honour of the city and its supporters.<sup>11</sup>

Australian Rules’ cheer squads in the 1980s, when they were less highly regulated by the leagues and the clubs than they are today, clearly were involved in this “macho posturing” that Peter Marsh and John Hughson both term an “illusion of violence”. This meant physically controlling and protecting the area behind the goals at home games unofficially reserved for hardcore elements of the home team’s support and symbolically “invading” the away team’s suburban ground. However, in Australian Rules, the cheer squads rarely attempted to take over the home team’s area or “end” as was a common practice among British hooligan firms in the 1970s. I believe that, at West Perth, our group would have defended its area behind the goals at the northern end of Leederville Oval if any opposing group of fans had attempted to take it. Given this “macho posturing” and “illusion of violence”, I suggest why a group of aboriginal Swan Districts’ supporters objected to our cheer squad taking up its prime position behind the goals at the southern-end of Bassendean Oval only 25-metres from where the most dedicated Swans fans congregate in the famous R.A. McDonald Stand (see Chapter 4).

At grounds like East Fremantle Oval, Fremantle Oval (South Fremantle’s ground), and Bassendean, there is no end of the ground

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<sup>9</sup> Mignon, “Another side to French exceptionalism”.

<sup>10</sup> Marsh, P. (1978), *Aggro: the Illusion of Violence*, hardcover edition (London: J M Dent & Sons); Hughson, “Australian soccer’s ‘ethnic tribes’”, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 148.

that can be regarded as “the away end” meaning the end that is generally neither loved nor patronized by the home fans. (However, at Bassendean Oval, away supporters often congregate in the Bill Walker Stand which is located immediately to the right of the McDonald Stand when viewed from inside the playing arena.) Both ends at those three grounds in the 1980s were effectively occupied, controlled, and monitored by the home fans, making trips to these grounds by semi-organized groups of away fans uncomfortable if not unpleasant. In the period of the cheer squad’s existence, we never took an organized group with flags to either East Fremantle or Fremantle Oval and only once did we take a group to Bassendean Oval. One of the reasons behind this was travel cost since most members of our group were working-class teenagers and all but three lived in the West Perth geographic district north of the Swan River centred on Balga, Carine, and Tuart Hill.

This book is not a conventional history book of the WPFC. The official history has been written by Brian Atkinson.<sup>12</sup> Instead, it examines primarily the so-called “relations of production”, to use Marx’s term, or, in other words, the nature of social relations within our cheer squad including values, cultural norms, ways of relating, and ethics. The Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin equated communism to “electrification plus the soviets” in his famous formula<sup>13</sup>, where the soviets were the workers’ cells that sprung up in the Russian factories and institutions in the lead up to the 1917 October Revolution. The formula can be related to Marx’s own idea of “forces of production” and “relations of production”.<sup>14</sup> Somewhat crudely, electrification might be

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<sup>12</sup> Atkinson, B. A. (2008), *It’s a Grand Old Flag: a History and Comprehensive Statistical Analysis of the West Perth Football Club* (Joondalup: West Perth Football Club).

<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Lenin cited in Slaughter, P. (1975), *Marxism & the Class Struggle* (London: New Park Publications), Chapter VII; available online: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/slaughte.htm> [accessed 23 August 2011]; Souvarine, B. (1939), *Stalin: a Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, James, C. L. R. (Trans.) (London: Alliance Book Corp. Longman, Green and Co.), Chapter VIII; available online: <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/souvar/works/stalin/ch08.htm> [accessed 23 August 2011]; Stalin, J. V. (1976), “The results of the first five-year plan: Report delivered at the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission of the C.P.S.U.(B.) January 7, 1933”, in *Problems of Leninism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press), pp. 578-630; available online: <http://www.marx2mao.com/Stalin/RFFYP33.html> [accessed 23 August 2011]; Vattimo, G. (2010), “Weak communism?” in Douzinas, C. and Žižek, S. (Eds.), *The Idea of Communism* (London and New York: Verso), pp. 205-7.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, K. H. (1976), *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume 1*, Fowkes, B. (Trans.) (London: Penguin Classics), p. 1065; Marx, K. H. (1977), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface (Moscow: Progress Publishers); available online:

said to refer to the forces of production and soviets to the relations of production. In the WAFL setting, the “forces of production” were the operations of the WAFL and its semi-professional clubs with the climax being the weekly games between the clubs. The “relations of production”, in our present context, refers to how people watched the games and supported the teams and the nature of the relationships and the values that surrounded and dictated fan interaction within and across the supporter bases.

Generally speaking, our group’s experience conforms to Armstrong and Hughson’s idea of fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” where affiliations are very loose and people can easily adjust their degree of commitment to a group and / or leave the group when their personal life circumstances and interests change. Hughson indicates that few people remained integral parts of hooligan firms in the UK beyond their early-20s although Cass Pennant and Rob Silvester’s book *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew* suggests that Millwall’s Bushwackers firm probably was an exception.<sup>15</sup>

As with the UK soccer hooligans, people recognized that joining our cheer squad was totally voluntary, without any of the legal and economic ties that define workplace, marketplace, and institutional relationships. As such, the group members were always careful not to “invade” another member’s outside life, i.e. his life outside the group at home, school or work. In this pre-mobile phone and internet era group members rarely contacted each other by phone or met during the week. Group members rarely inquired if someone stopped attending football games. This was not because they did not care but because members recognized that they had no moral authority over another member’s life.

Group members only met five times outside match days during the 1984-86 period. Four of these meetings occurred during regular football seasons. Group members met twice on Sundays to attend Channel Seven’s “World of Football” programme telecasts held within football club social rooms (once at West Perth and once at Swan Districts); once members met at Perth Football Club at Lathlain Park on a weeknight

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<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm> [accessed 23 August 2011].

<sup>15</sup> Pennant, C. (2003), *Congratulations, you have just met the I.C.F. (West Ham United)* (London: John Blake Publishing); Pennant, C. (2008), *Cass* (London: John Blake Publishing); Pennant, C. and R. Silvester (2004), *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew: the True Story of Pompey’s Legendary Football Fans*, paperback edition (London: John Blake Publishing).



evening to prepare a banner for the forthcoming state match; and once members attended the Sandover Medal Night in 1984 at the now demolished Perth Entertainment Centre (the only time that the WAFL fairest-and-best player award has been opened to the public). Lastly, on one other occasion, three group members (Mike C., Pete C., and me) went to a season-opening one-day cricket match at the WACA Ground.

When the cheer squad began to break up, in the first few games of 1986, members simply stopped attending games or they attended games but did not sit with the group. No-one made any effort to “go against the grain” and revive or resuscitate the ailing squad. The same thing happened around 1987 at Portsmouth Football Club’s 6.57 Crew, as recounted by Pennant and Silvester, when former hooligans found that soccer had lost its appeal and the drug scene became the new object of fashion.<sup>16</sup> Pennant and Silvester state that the prime years of the 6.57 Crew, named after the time that the train carrying fans to away matches left Portsmouth Station, should be regarded as 1981 to 1986.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that the time of the firm’s demise can be pinpointed fairly precisely. Nowadays “Pompey” (Portsmouth FC) firm members only get together for commemorative occasions or for major games against rivals such as Millwall or Cardiff. West Ham United’s (in)famous Inter City Firm (ICF) likewise no longer exists today. No-one officially disbanded either soccer firm; people just stopped actively identifying with the firms and with their past histories on match days. West Ham United ICF’s Cass Pennant views this as a generational thing. He argues that soccer hooliganism was a product of the 1970s and 1980s and soon a new generation would arise which has no memory of the hooliganism of that time. Although news reports of hooliganism overseas will continue to revive local memories (such as Russian hooligans at the 2016 European Championships in France), in the UK it is understood that hooliganism was a product of its time. Few people want it revived.

The West Perth cheer squad, I believe, disbanded also as a consequence of new social and occupational divides within the group becoming apparent as well as people’s interests changing. For example, I had left school and begun university study; Mark “Thommo” Thompson had left school to become a plasterer; and others had also gone their

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<sup>16</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

various ways. I remember talking with Thommo about his plastering work on the Parmelia Hotel job during one Leederville Oval match in 1986 before the cheer squad faded away. I had also drifted apart from school-friend Mike Blewett as high-school had ended for us in November 1985. He may not even have returned to the cheer squad for 1986. We became a little like the punk-band the Clash without Mick Jones! When group members were all still at school (or most of us), any social or economic divisions within the group did not seem important. Group members all bonded together in an egalitarian atmosphere to support the club and to defend the honour of the team and the district. Significantly all but three members lived within the WPFC geographic district and so members could reasonably think of defending the district and its honour through the cheer squad.

The cheer squad certainly had a “macho aspect” or an “illusion of violence”. The group was a relatively intimidating bunch; all of the group members were male (except for the four-year-old female niece or cousin of the C. brothers); the group had 15 or more committed members at its peak; and three-quarters of the group members were aged 14 to 18. In addition to the committed group of 15, who knew all of the others by name, there were other people who followed the cheer squad or sat with us during major games. At one neutral-venue game, at Subiaco Oval<sup>18</sup>, cheer squad members sat with another West Perth unofficial supporter group, which exists to this day, known as “Grandstand Falcons” which used to then congregate at the top of the Leederville grandstand at home games.

At this neutral Subiaco Oval game, our cheer squad sat in front of the Grandstand Falcons with a third section of seats in front of the cheer squad reserved for our flags and banners. (Our group never took floggers to away games but stored them in the WPFC club facilities at Leederville Oval.) Altogether there would have been over 50 people there that day across both groups combined. The noise the combined group made under the grandstand roof, on the second- (middle-) tier of the three-tier stand behind the Fremantle-end goals, was magnificent when magnified by the echoes. We sang the Grandstand Falcons’ powerful song “This Time (Get It Right)” about England’s 1982 World

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<sup>18</sup> This was the Round 13 (30 June) 1984 West Perth versus South Fremantle match, according to my 1984 season notes compiled during 1984. The WAFL Online website states that the official attendance was 10,496.

Cup hopes (with England changed to West Perth and the “white” dropped from “red, white, and blue”).<sup>19</sup> This song summed up perfectly people’s emotions at the time because it had been a decade since West Perth had last appeared in a grand final and hopes had been dashed on quite a few occasions. In hindsight, this was our cheer squad’s greatest day.

This book also considers the cheer squad’s chants and songs (see Chapter 4) as well as the racial or ethnic aspect of supporting a team commonly known as the “Garlic Munchers”, a name with Italian connotations, which was, during that era, in the very unusual situation of having a Chinese-Australian player as captain in the shape of long-serving rover Les Fong (284 games played, 1973-87).<sup>20</sup>

This book also discusses the nature of cheer squad and ordinary fan support for each of the WAFL teams (Chapter 4) and part of Chapter 4 is devoted to West Perth’s on-field performance from 1984 to 1986. That part-chapter within Chapter 4 also looks at some of the best and most loved West Perth players of the era. The team had not played in a grand final since 1975 but pride in the club meant that, during the period from 1976 to 1986, West Perth never finished last and in the 1980s it never finished in the bottom two.

I believe that West Perth was driven more by pure confidence and emotion than some of the other clubs (which were more clinical and consistent) and, at Leederville Oval during the cheer squad’s era, West Perth was often a formidable team regardless of the opponent.

A study of the comprehensive statistics section of Atkinson’s *It’s a Grand Old Flag* shows that, in the era between the premiership in 1975 and the introduction of West Coast Eagles in 1987 (termed the “drought era” by Atkinson), West Perth often beat the eventual premier team two or three times a year during the qualifying rounds. For example, the club achieved two or three wins a season against Perth in 1977; East Perth in 1978; Swan Districts in 1982 and 1984; and East Fremantle in 1985. As such, the club as a whole during the drought era could be termed an under-performer, although arguably it never had the true superstars like Cable or Wiley or Rioli or Mainwaring or Moss or the Krakouer brothers or Hunter needed to move it from fourth (1985) or third (1982) into

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<sup>19</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk9LzuoBTWk> [accessed 18 February 2017].

<sup>20</sup> Atkinson, *It’s a Grand Old Flag*, p. 356.

second or first. The cheer squad mirrored the team in spirit. I believe that the group possessed a larrikin charm, good humour, warmth, and a good attitude to life. We were all relaxed but committed. Nearly all group members sat with the group for every game during its lifetime.

The cheer squad's favourite player was Phil Bradmore (139 games played, 1981-88)<sup>21</sup>, a maverick character with long arms and shaved head (many years before a shaved head became an obligatory fashion accessory for the over-35s). Bradmore, restless and wild, each match day used to prowl vast stretches of territory centring on his centre-half-forward position. The group members loved his exaggerated gestures and his body language; his Victorian sophistication (he had played a few games at Footscray); and his perpetual good-natured teasing grin. He really looked like he was playing for the camera in an era when most WAFL matches were not televised. One of the cheer squad's favourite chants was "Phil Bradmore", followed by the standard three claps, whenever Bradmore scored a goal or did anything impressive. Sometimes the chant would break out for no obvious reason at all. Bradmore affirmed a part of the group members themselves as the members were mostly mavericks and misfits. Bradmore was an above-average and arguably a brilliant player who was authentic enough to allow his true character and personality to shine through on the field. Brian Atkinson comments as follows about Phil Bradmore:

"I always thought that Phil Bradmore was underrated (so did [1982-84 West Perth coach] Dennis Cometti). I thought he was closer to 'brilliant' than to 'above average'. He was different and 'clowned around' a bit. He played the very difficult position of centre half forward. He was an outstanding mark, a very very good kick, and his accurate creative long handball to players streaming downfield was fantastic. He kicked 193 goals and played in the NSW State of Origin team at the 1988 Australian Football Championships in 1988 in Adelaide. It must have been a good team because it defeated the John Todd coached Western Australian State Team"<sup>22</sup>

Another of the cheer squad's favourite players was John "Duckie" Duckworth (117 games played, 1977-78, 1981-83, 1985)<sup>23</sup>, a strongly-built ruckman or key defender and an ex-Fitzroy (VFL/AFL) player, who missed the 1984 season but made an impressive comeback in 1985 at

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 19 November 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 355.

the age of 35 under new coach John Wynne. Vietnam veteran Duckworth was the physical presence of the West Perth sides of the mid- to late-1970s and the early-1980s. He would bring some strength and machismo into West Perth teams which were badly needed especially during heated encounters with arch-enemy East Perth. Despite his reputation as a tough player, Magarey Medallist Duckworth had a charm, a sense of humour, and a sense of ethics that East Perth's strong-armed players of that era arguably lacked. The "Central District" page at Full Points Footy, a South Australian website authored by football traditionalist John Devaney, writes as follows about John Duckworth:

"Vietnam veteran John Duckworth became Centrals' second Magarey Medallist in 1979 after a barnstorming debut season with the Dogs. Duckworth was the latest in a series of outstanding West Australians to represent the club, and although he only played a total of 42 games over two seasons at Elizabeth his impact on the club as well as on the game in South Australia in general went well beyond this".<sup>24</sup>

The same webpage lists Duckworth as one of the top nine best ever Central District footballers in a list which starts off with the great Hawthorn (VFL/AFL) rover John "The Rat" Platten. Part of this humble, charming, and warm West Perth ethos that the cheer squad members identified with in the 1980s could be said to have been a legacy of the West Perth greats of the 1960s and 1970s, Bill Dempsey, Mel Whinnen, and Graham "Polly" Farmer, all of whom were fair ball-players and committed team-men who never wanted to give undue attention to their own efforts. Years later I would often drive along The Graham Farmer Freeway, actually a tunnel for most of its length, which follows the same pathway that Farmer took from East Perth to West Perth, and silently offer my respects to the great man. Long-serving players John Duckworth, Les Fong, and Geoff Hendriks (170 games played, 1975-85)<sup>25</sup> linked the West Perth of the mid-1980s with the West Perth of the mid-1970s. In the same way, the arrogance and aggression of former captain Mal Brown lingered on in the East Perth teams of the late-1970s.

Lastly, most UK soccer hooligans, including Bill Gardner and Cass Pennant of West Ham United's ICF and Rob Silvester of Portsmouth's

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<sup>24</sup> Devaney, J., Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Central\\_District.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Central_District.htm) [accessed 22 December 2010]. The website can now be found at <http://australianfootball.com/>

<sup>25</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 360.

6.57 Crew, although they regret their involvement in certain incidents, claim that their years with the firms were the best of their lives and that overall it was an experience that they now look back on with extreme fondness. I can say the same about my time as co-founder of the West Perth unofficial cheer squad that operated during the years of 1984-86. Brian Atkinson references this cheer squad as follows: "I certainly remember the support and enthusiasm coming from behind the goals, but because it was unofficial nothing was retained on the record".<sup>26</sup>

With the WAFL now no longer a first-tier competition<sup>27</sup>, and average crowds having stabilized in this post-Fremantle Dockers era at around 2,000 people (compared to average crowds of 8,000 to 10,000 people during the 1980s), this book is an important social and sporting history of a special element of Western Australian life during a special era. The days of the 1980s will never be repeated. That was an era when the most watched and followed Australian Rules competition in Western Australia was one owned and operated by Western Australians. Now Western Australia is only a distant outpost of Melbourne in football terms and Perth's two AFL national-league clubs are highly corporatized and generic. The AFL monitors and controls the entire football world like the communist party in a dictatorship, a trend which only worsened under the leadership tenure of one Andrew Demetriou. The atmospheric concrete terraces and grassy bank at Subiaco Oval are long gone (as are most of the Aboriginal supporters clearly visible behind the city-end goals on grand final DVDs from the 1970s) and supporting high-level football is now very much a commodified and financially expensive pursuit. Football in Western Australia will never be the same.

As the Full Points Footy website comments about South Australia's entry into the AFL in 1991 through the Adelaide Crows FC: "[This was] a development ... [which] contributed significantly to the SANFL's transition from being the 'shop window' of the state's football talent to little more than a breeding ground for the AFL".<sup>28</sup> The same webpage goes on to add that: "[T]hrough no fault of its own, the SANFL had in a few short years been irreversibly transformed from a major player on the Australian football stage to an incidental cameo of comparatively

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 9 December 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Frost, *Immortals*, p. 234.

<sup>28</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/central\\_district\\_part\\_2.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/central_district_part_2.htm) [accessed 22 December 2010].

negligible importance and interest”.<sup>29</sup> The SANFL and WAFL are in identical positions of having once been tier-one football leagues in their respective states but having now dropped down to being second-tier competitions.<sup>30</sup> The former East Perth and Richmond player and South Fremantle coach Mal Brown made the following comments about the sad decline of the WAFL in the post-West Coast Eagles era:

“Sadly, from Perth’s [Football Club] point of view the West Coast Eagles were hovering overhead, and came into being the next season – and that was the end of an era. The West Australian domestic competition took a nosedive from which it can never recover lost status or spectator appeal.

“We have produced one mighty football team but to the detriment of the competition that had flown the Aussie Rules flag with distinction for many years. ... The shift of the power base from the domestic competition to the Eagles literally decimated the local competition – those opportunists [in control of the Eagles early on] gave no thought to the future”.<sup>31</sup>

I can accept that most Western Australian-based football supporters prefer the status quo or at least view it as “inevitable” (and a more discouraging word is yet to be invented). However, others, such as me, look back at what Perth football had in the late-1970s and early-1980s, in terms of the WAFL at its peak, and think how could we have been so silly to throw it all away? Those who would like to dare imagine a national competition other than the AFL remember fondly the National Football League’s Wills Cup series of 1976 (revived, to some extent, from 2011-14 by the Foxtel Cup national competition for second-tier clubs).

The Full Points Footy website also makes some important observations about the great traditions of clubs such as South Fremantle and Swan Districts compared to new clubs such as West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers. It is worth quoting the relevant paragraph in full:

“In 1993, the widespread popular perception was that the status of clubs like Swans and South had been diminished by the emergence of a locally-based AFL club, the West Coast Eagles. Within two years there would be further erosion of status - or so it was widely contended - after the arrival on the scene of a second West Australian AFL side, Fremantle. Whether or not you agree with this viewpoint probably depends on your definition of the word ‘status’.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Frost, *Immortals*, p. 234.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, M. and B. Hansen (1994), *Mal Brown & Mongrels I’ve Met* (Mt Waverley: Brian Edward Hansen), pp. 179, 188.

However, one way in which newcomers like the Eagles and Dockers are clearly inferior to the likes of Swan Districts and South Fremantle is in terms of tradition. All WAFL clubs other than Peel Thunder have traditions deriving from decades of aspiration, frustration, achievement and despair, whereas clubs like West Coast and Fremantle are still fumbling towards the basic sense of identity that is needed before any genuine sense of tradition can develop. Moreover, with games like their round 16 clash in 1993 at Bassendean Oval, Swan Districts and South Fremantle are continuing to build on and enrich both their own unique traditions, and that of the sport of Australian football as a whole. Long may it continue to be so".<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the same website comments pertinently that:

"The sport of Australian football needs clubs like Claremont (and Subiaco) every bit as much as it needs the West Coast Eagles, or Essendon, or Collingwood. Indeed, without the likes of Claremont, Subiaco, Central District, Norwood and so forth, the likes of West Coast, Collingwood, Essendon, Adelaide etc. could not exist, and neither, arguably, would the sport of Australian football".<sup>33</sup>

Very few Western Australian football supporters, and perhaps only a slightly higher percentage of South Australians, would give much more than lip-service to the above proposition today. Despite this, it is the position unashamedly adopted by me as football traditionalist. I agree with 27-year-old Kova, leader of traditional soccer club Melbourne Knights' hooligan firm MCF, who makes the following relevant comments:

"Another thing MCF stands for is traditional football; football for football's sake. ... That [corporatization trend] is a massive [object of] hatred for us. We think a club should be formed organically, not just by five guys in suits. ... They say soccer is a business [but] it's not. I support Melbourne Croatia; I've been here since day zot. I don't want to support a plastic club".<sup>34</sup>

This book aims for a writing style that is accessible to the wider public but still academically rigorous. It also draws upon the memories of the other cheer-squad co-founder, Mike Blewett, based on personal conversations I had with him in Kalgoorlie on 14 July 2011. Mike supplies a key story of the cheer squad's heated confrontation with the Swan Districts' ruckman-enforcer of the 1980s Ron Boucher. This is one

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<sup>32</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/cliffhanger\\_at\\_bassendean.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/cliffhanger_at_bassendean.htm) [accessed 23 December 2010].

<sup>33</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont\\_Part\\_Two.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont_Part_Two.htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>34</sup> Group interview, 11 January 2011.



as yet untold story from the heated and spiteful clashes between West Perth and Swan Districts during the 1980s.

As an author I was personally influenced by Nick Hornby's best-selling autobiographical account of his life as an Arsenal supporter in *Fever Pitch*.<sup>35</sup> Hornby's opening section in *Fever Pitch*, where he describes the alienation he experienced eating Monday night dinners in lonely airport hotels with his divorced father, certainly gives his book an early dose of grim social-realism and he captures the reader's interest. Hornby's book is a tragic fan's reminiscence of life as an Arsenal supporter. He recounts moving into a home near the Arsenal soccer ground at Highbury and recalls his disappointment that the area had moved on and few supporters of the club could be seen in its streets. He expected men at every house to open their doors in perfect synchronization at 2.45pm on home match days and then all walk down the footpath together to the ground. In Marxist terms it could be said that Hornby then realized that he had previously "reified" his idealized perceptions of the Finsbury Park district around Highbury by sub-consciously removing the imagined world in his mind from the actual "out-there" reality. The world of the soccer supporters who inhabited Highbury on match days had also become increasingly divorced from the actual life of the surrounding Finsbury Park district.

We also saw these demographic and identity issues arise in West Perth's controversial move to Arena Joondalup from Leederville Oval in 1994 and issues of West Perth's identity have been brought to the forefront of many people's consciousness because of this move. Can you relocate a club and keep its spirit and identity? Can West Ham United's soul survive its 2016 move from Upton Park? The fact that archival East Perth has now taken over the hallowed turf at Leederville Oval is a distasteful fact for some old-time West Perth supporters including me. Mike B. claims that the WPFC has "detached itself from its community"<sup>36</sup> because of its relocation to the far northern suburbs which are culturally, socially, and demographically very different from the area around Leederville Oval. West Perth has had a multicultural identity since the Second World War (much like South Fremantle) and its Italian, Greek, and Croatian players and supporters earned it the racist tag of

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<sup>35</sup> Hornby, N. (2009), *Fever Pitch* (Melbourne: Penguin Australia).

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview with the author, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, 14 July 2011.

“Garlic Munchers”. Can the club keep this multicultural identity after moving to a very-white and very-British area such as Joondalup and surrounds where half the population speaks in an English accent and stickers supporting various lower-division English soccer clubs adorn so many car windows?

I have also been influenced by the books written by West Ham United ICF lead men, Bill Gardner and Cass Pennant, and Celtic Soccer Crew’s John O’Kane.<sup>37</sup> I hope that this book can be seen as having been written in the same spirit, by someone who is both a football fan and an academic researcher.

The chapter of his book *Good Afternoon Gentlemen, the Name’s Bill Gardner* that the lead ICF man Bill Gardner (ably assisted by Cass Pennant) devotes to his favourite West Ham United players over the colourful era of the ICF demonstrates that not all soccer hooligans were stupid people nor did they all lack a genuine interest in the actual games of soccer.<sup>38</sup> As the Amazon customer reviewer of Gardner’s book Peter H. Burns writes: “[h]is book exceeds the genre’s standards because he actually speaks about the game and its players as much as the aggro that occurred off the pitch. Most of these [other] books have very little to say about the [actual] game at all”.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in this book many of the great and not-so-great West Perth players of the mid-1980s are recalled as well as many of the stars from rival clubs.

In the next chapter, I tie in my discussion of the West Perth cheer squad with the academic literature in the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies that have explored the English, European, and world “soccer hooliganism” of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Readers not interested in soccer hooliganism and / or with academic approaches to this topic may prefer to skip the next chapter.

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<sup>37</sup> Gardner, B. (2006), *Good Afternoon Gentlemen, the Name’s Bill Gardner*, with C. Pennant (London: John Blake Publishing); Pennant, *Congratulations*; O’Kane, J. (2006), *Celtic Soccer Crew: what the hell do we care?* (London: Pennant Books).

<sup>38</sup> Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*.

<sup>39</sup> Peter H. Burns quote cited at Amazon.com [posted 24 October 2008, accessed 8 October 2013].

## Chapter 2

### Review of the “soccer hooligan” literature

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter I introduce key studies in the academic literature on soccer hooliganism in the UK and around the world and review these studies. This review does not aim to be comprehensive or complete as this literature is growing day by day. I also consider the growing number of popular “confessions” books written by ex-hooligans. In fact, the legendary “black Hammer” turned author Cass Pennant seems to be the main culprit! A large number of these confessions books have been written since the hooligan scene wound itself up in the late-1980s.

Several authors touch on the fascinating intersection between punk rock music and soccer hooliganism. Pennant considers the case of punk rock bands Sham 69 and Cockney Rejects whose East London identifications are well known.<sup>40</sup> These East London identifications made sense within the punk rock scene which has always had a sociologically informed emphasis upon place which can be traced back to the Sex Pistols and the SEX shop run by Westwood and McLaren at 430 The King’s Road, Chelsea.<sup>41</sup> Local East London historian John G. Bennett (who led a “Jack the Ripper” guided tour I attended in Whitechapel on 10 June 2010) cites Sham 69’s song “George Davis is Innocent” from the band’s debut album 1978’s *Tell the Truth*: “They’re never gonna leave you alone / They’re never gonna leave you alone / You know where you bloody live / East London is your home!”<sup>42</sup> As Sham 69 was in fact from Hersham in outer south-west London, this song suggests that East London has become a romanticized *spiritual locality* uncontainable by its actual geographic boundaries. However, despite song lyrics such as these, the close links between West Ham United’s ICF and band members of The Business, Cock Sparrer, Cockney Rejects, and Sham 69 are less well documented. A famous picture shows the Cock Sparrer band members proudly posing inside the main gates at West Ham

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<sup>40</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*, Chapter 6.

<sup>41</sup> Bestley, R. (2011), “From ‘London’s Burning’ to ‘Sten Guns in Sunderland’”, *Punk & Post-Punk*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 41-71, doi:10.1386/punk.1.1.41\_1; Savage, J. (2005), *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber and Faber).

<sup>42</sup> Sham 69 lyrics cited in Bennett, J. G. (2009), *E.1: a Journey through Whitechapel and Spitalfields* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications), p. 34.

United's Upton Park ground. As Pennant writes, this known link between certain East London punk bands and West Ham United's ICF resulted in Cockney Rejects' concerts in the Midlands and the north of England frequently being sites of *soccer-related* violence.<sup>43</sup> Cockney Rejects released a very moving new single and video-clip on 11 April 2016 called "Goodbye Upton Park" about West Ham's permanent move away from the club's traditional home ground (to move to the London Olympic Stadium).<sup>44</sup>

This chapter also considers why hooliganism of the British variety never caught on in Australian Rules or even in Australian soccer and is unlikely to do so in the future especially with regards to Australian Rules. This is a complex question with no obvious answers. It is important to point out that British soccer hooliganism, like British punk rock, was a unique product of time and place. Peter Marsh explains as follows: "aggro always reflects, in the particular form it takes on, the social forces of a given era".<sup>45</sup> Sociologically soccer hooliganism belonged to the 1970s and 1980s, the time when the post-war "consensus" between the two major political parties had broken down; unemployment was rising appreciably for the first time since the end of World War II; the British Labour Party under the late James Callaghan (1912-2005) faced the indignity of enforced civil service cuts under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity package; and (later) Mrs Thatcher's economic rationalism and anti-trade union stance rendered life much more difficult for a significant portion of what remained of the industrial working-class.<sup>46</sup> Even in a different era in the UK hooliganism may not have happened or probably would not have happened. Even now key authors such as ICF leader Cass Pennant and the 6.57 Crew's Rob Silvester are happy to talk about hooliganism in the past tense although some firms, especially those from outside of London, still operate on a regular basis.

Pennant and Silvester suggest that socio-economic conditions and cramped housing today in Cardiff mean that alienated young gang members will continue to gravitate towards Cardiff City's Soul Crew.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*, Chapter 6. See also the interview with Cockney Rejects' frontman Jeff Geggus aka Jeff Turner aka "Stinky" Turner at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nKdqO279kl> [accessed 11 January 2017].

<sup>44</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAsyGA5-a-g> [accessed 5 January 2017].

<sup>45</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 90.

<sup>46</sup> Savage, *England's Dreaming*, p. 480.

<sup>47</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

This point is somewhat surprising, within the overall context of their book, given that Pennant and Silvester point to the harshness of life in Portsmouth as a factor behind the size of Portsmouth's firm in the 1970s and 1980s but then argue that hooliganism is a fashion which Portsmouth youth have lost interest in.<sup>48</sup> Why then did Portsmouth youth view hooliganism as a fashion but Cardiff youth view it as something more integral to their lives? Pennant and Silvester's statement is not necessarily incorrect but it does suggest areas where more detailed research is needed to shed light on regional characteristics and anomalies.

Unlike nearly all academic research on hooliganism, I take the popular literature seriously and view it with respect because these books are the considered voices of the past leaders of the various firms. It would surely be ivory-tower arrogance and stupidity for any researcher to refuse to read or cite a book simply because the book's author is not a full-time academic. The popular books fill in significant gaps especially with respect to firms and districts that have not been studied in detail by academics such as West Ham United's ICF, Portsmouth's 6.57 Crew, and Celtic's Celtic Soccer Crew. Obviously, I will not go the other extreme and accept as fact every claim or statement made by the authors of the popular books. However, if a claim receives support from a number of authors I would then regard it as having more credibility. Two important claims consistently supported in the popular literature are that: (a) West Ham United's ICF was the top and most influential firm in the country during the 1970s and 1980s; and (b) Portsmouth's 6.57 Crew was in the top two to five firms during this same period. In this chapter I also revisit the Marxist theoretical perspective, originally associated with Ian Taylor. I argue that, although Marxist perspectives are now unfashionable throughout academia, the perspective still has something to offer.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Popular and academic theories of soccer hooliganism**

Dunning et al. outline the major “popular” theories of hooliganism put forward by non-academics in the media and in politics. After this they outline the main academic approaches used by the academic researchers.<sup>49</sup> The popular arguments tend to be difficult to shed light on through empirical research and hence difficult to conclusively accept or reject. No doubt most of them contain some degree of correspondence with reality. Another point to note, highlighted in Dunning et al.’s review chapter, is that some of the popular theories contradict each other.<sup>50</sup> For example, the theory that hooliganism is due to unemployment appears to contradict the theory that hooliganism is due to affluence. The popular theories are as follows: soccer hooliganism is caused by: “[1] excessive alcohol consumption; [2] violent incidents on the field of play or biased and incompetent refereeing; [3] unemployment; [4] affluence; and [5] ‘permissiveness’”.<sup>51</sup>

The academic theories can be divided into: the early-dominant “figurational” or “process-sociological” approach of Dunning et al.<sup>52</sup>; the “anthropological” approach of Armstrong and Harris<sup>53</sup>; the post-modern approach of Giulianotti; the Marxist approach of Taylor, Clarke, and Hargreaves; the “ethogenic” approach of Marsh<sup>54</sup>; the “psychological reversal theory” approach of Kerr; and the historically sensitive / historical approaches of King and Robson.<sup>55</sup> Of the important Australian researchers, cultural studies author John Hughson can be grouped with the Anthropological School or its close-relative the Ethogenic School while sports historian Roy Hay, a stalwart of the club known traditionally as North Geelong Croatia, belongs to the historically sensitive approach.

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<sup>49</sup> Dunning, E., Murphy, P. and I. Waddington (2002), “Towards a sociological understanding of football hooliganism as a world phenomenon”, in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), pp. 1-22.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Dunning, E. (1999), *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilisation* (London and New York: Routledge); Dunning, E., Murphy, P. and I. Waddington (1991), “Anthropological versus sociological approaches to the study of football hooliganism: some critical notes”, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 459-78.

<sup>53</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*; Armstrong, G. and R. Harris (1991), “Football hooliganism: theory and evidence”, *Sociological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 427-58.

<sup>54</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Dunning et al., “Towards a sociological understanding”, p. 13.

The anthropological studies, whilst not denying the importance of social class to an understanding of hooligan associations and behaviours, move away consciously from the Marxist position that would portray hooliganism as simply another form of working-class resistance. A Marxist position might either view hooliganism in a very positive light as straight-forward working-class protest or shift to the neo-Marxist stance of the philosophers of the 1960s Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse who emphasized how the working-class had been bribed and co-opted to serve capital and how challenges to the system as a whole were diverted to ends that were either unproductive or blatantly served capitalism. The neo-Marxist position might then point to hooliganism as a basically negative and reactionary phenomenon whereby members of the working-class waste energy and resources fighting among themselves.<sup>56</sup> Hooliganism could then be interpreted as a form of fascist behaviour in a society where the working-class revolution never happened. This analysis could be supported by the unfortunate association of some hooligans with the National Front (NF), British National Party (BNP), and other organized fascist and borderline fascist groups. This alleged fascist connection has been viewed as important by some authors in the case of Sydney United's BBB which has in the past revered Croatia's World War II leader Ante Pavelić. In various places Hughson has explored at length the issue of the extent of actual fascism within the BBB.

### ***Giving the Marxist approach another chance***

I believe that the Marxist approach can be restored if it is sufficiently nuanced and applied directly to specific localized contexts rather than left to remain in the form of generalizations applied to the whole of a society. The study of Portsmouth FC by non-academic authors Pennant and Silvester opens up with some insightful sociological rumination by the author pair, the ICF's "black Hammer", Cass Pennant, and Portsmouth 6.57 Crew's Rob Silvester.<sup>57</sup> Their book *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew* includes the usual stream-of-consciousness discussions of key matches by a number of different authors grouped together in chapters

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

according to team played and other headings.<sup>58</sup> These long quotations, all in italics font, tend to run into each other and, since they are anonymous, it is hard to be sure how much credence to give to them. They tend to describe only events and people's feelings about the events in hindsight. Since there are so many events, for non-participants reading the book, they tend to run into each other and the incidents become indistinguishable and forgettable. The, in my opinion, more interesting sociological rumination is left to the two principal authors and especially to the book's opening pages.

The interesting sociological question, in my view, is why a seaside city of 200,000 inhabitants produced one of the best and largest hooligan firms in England whereas neighbouring town Southampton had hardly any firm to speak of? Silvester argues that Portsmouth being a navy town gives it a completely different character to Southampton which is a town of farmers. After World War II large numbers of high-rise council tower blocks were built in Portsmouth and in various estates located at the fringes of the city. These were designed to house military officers returning from the war. Portsmouth was a convenient location to house these people. The city now has a very high population density among cities of a similar population in the UK. All of these facts have produced an alienated and disenfranchised proletariat or lumpenproletariat (to use the traditional Marxist terms) in the council housing estates. These estates contributed their own sub-gangs to Portsmouth's 6.57 Crew in the 1980s. Each sub-gang was based around one or more pubs located usually within but sometimes just outside each council estate. Pennant and Silvester also talk about navy people marrying Portsmouth girls and remaining in the area thus permanently increasing the percentage of the population with military attitudes and training compared to other population centres.<sup>59</sup>

The inter-generational hatred in Portsmouth towards Southampton is indicated by the nickname "Scum" or "Scummers". Pennant and Silvester indicate just how widespread this is by telling an anecdote of two elderly men in a Pompey (Portsmouth) pub. One has a newspaper in front of him and says to the other: "I see the Scummers lost again last night".<sup>60</sup> Although one might think the origin of the name is lost in time,

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



Pennant and Silvester trace it to a strike on the Portsmouth docks defeated by the importation of non-union “scum” labour from Southampton.<sup>61</sup> This indicates the original class basis of Portsmouth’s residents’ dislike of the inhabitants of their neighbouring town.

### ***Dunning’s theory of “fault-lines”***

Dunning theorizes that soccer violence occurs around a given city or region’s “fault-lines” which might be class-based (as in England); religion-based (as in Glasgow); ethnic-based (as in South African soccer and Australia’s former NSL); or regional-based; or city-versus-country-based.<sup>62</sup> The equivalent term to “fault-line” within Maoist theory might be “principal contradiction”.<sup>63</sup> In Portsmouth we see fault-lines which are class-based but also centre on the classic city-country divide whereby Portsmouth fans believe that their city and its residents are laughed at by Londoners due to their perceived country backwardness and lack of fashion sense.

Interestingly, Pave Jusup and Kova of MCF distinguish Melbourne Knights’ “political” rivalries with Yugoslav communist clubs such as Footscray JUST and Serbian clubs such as Springvale White Eagles with the (non-political) “football” rivalries with old NSL clubs such as the Italian community’s Adelaide City Juventus and the Greek community’s South Melbourne Hellas.<sup>64</sup> Pave points out that the rivalries with Adelaide City and South Melbourne resulted simply from on-field events such as Melbourne Knights’ grand final defeats at the hands of these two clubs.<sup>65</sup>

Attempting to transplant tension caused by one fault-line to a place where that fault-line is not dominant creates comical or ridiculous outcomes such as when Rangers supporters chant that “we’re up to our knees in Fenian blood” in the freezing, half-empty stands at Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Scottish Highlands. Rangers and Celtic find it very difficult to market their clubs overseas, and especially in Asia, where the religious fault-line of Catholic-versus-Protestant has not been

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Dunning, *Sport Matters*.

<sup>63</sup> Mao, Z. D. (1971), “On contradiction”, in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press), Part IV, pp. 109-17.

<sup>64</sup> Group interview, 11 January 2011.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

a part of the religious histories of these countries most of which have non-Christian majorities.<sup>66</sup> Melbourne Victory A-League fans in Australia have attempted to label Sydney FC “Scum” (while Adelaide United is the “Pissants”) but this has not been altogether successful. It may well have been an attempt by English or Scottish Melbourne Victory fans to replicate the Portsmouth versus Southampton rivalry in Australia since Sydney is also the neighbouring club “just up the coast” from Melbourne. These same Victory fans might have then felt somewhat silly given that new club Melbourne Heart, cross-town rivals to Victory, began playing in the Southampton jersey of red-and-white vertical stripes (before being bought by Manchester City). Will the real Scummers please stand up?

### ***Dunning’s theory of fans’ identification with and pride in the team***

Dunning theorizes that working-class people identify with their football team to the extent that they feel pride and self-respect when the team does well and loss of pride and loss of self-respect when the team does badly.<sup>67</sup> Regarding Australia’s ethnic soccer clubs in the former NSL, Lynch and Veal write that: “Nationalistic loyalty also played a part: a club victory could take on the stature of a ‘victory’ for a homeland, just as a defeat was also somewhat about loss of national face”.<sup>68</sup>

The strength of these feelings of pride / loss of pride is based on the degree of the person’s identification with the team and with the district and the number of interests that she / he has outside of soccer. For the person with strong identification with the district and few outside interests, the pride or loss of pride felt when the team does well or badly is at the maximum level. This theory can be also used with respect to both Australian Rules clubs and soccer clubs in Australia. This theory can explain the strength of the ICF and Millwall’s Bushwackers during the 1980s as these two clubs are based in the poorer and more stigmatized and isolated regions of East London (West Ham) and south-east London (Millwall), rather than in the west or north. In another Cass Pennant book, about the proto-West Ham United firm Mile End Mob

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<sup>66</sup> Giulianotti, R. and M. Gerrard (2001), “Cruel Britannia? Glasgow Rangers, Scotland and ‘hot’ football rivalries”, in Armstrong, G. and Giulianotti, R. (Eds.), *Fear and Loathing in World Football* (Oxford and New York: Berg), pp. 23-42.

<sup>67</sup> Dunning, *Sport Matters*.

<sup>68</sup> Lynch, R. L. and A. J. Veal (1996), *Australian Leisure* (South Melbourne: Longman), p. 259.

from the pre-ICF era, Millwall fans are still derisively termed “gypsies”.<sup>69</sup> Fans’ identifications with the club and district merge here with class identifications and perspectives.

Furthermore, West Ham’s performances have generally been disappointing to fans over the past 30 years. However, the team did manage to avoid relegation for the main years of the casual firms, 1981 to 1986. Wikipedia traces West Ham United’s performances as follows during these years:

“In 1978, West Ham were [sic] again relegated to Division Two, but [John] Lyall was retained as manager and led the team to an FA Cup Final win against Arsenal in 1980. This is notable because no team outside the top division has won the trophy since that time. West Ham were promoted to Division One in 1981, and finished in the top ten of the first division for the next three seasons, before achieving their highest ever league finish of third in 1985/86. However, they were relegated again in 1989. This second relegation resulted in John Lyall’s sacking, despite the fact that that stay in Division One saw West Ham achieve their highest-ever placing in the top division, finishing 3rd in 1986”.<sup>70</sup>

ICF lead man Bill Gardner has said that the West Ham fans of the 1970s and 1980s were dispirited and felt a loss of pride because of the first XI’s poor showings and lack of effort; this inspired the ICF to become the strongest football firm in the country.<sup>71</sup> The fans felt a lack of respect from other Premier League team followers, and this was a more severe blow than if the club had actually been relegated and performed highly among a less capable set of teams.

In addition, the 6.57 Crew’s activities became more committed and serious in the late-1970s when the Portsmouth club was rapidly falling through the divisions. Having had the unique and rare experience of rapidly falling through the divisions, Portsmouth fans in the 1970s were especially touchy. Frequent violence became necessary in order to restore the universe to its rightful order in the fans’ own eyes and to ensure that the firm and the city were accorded proper respect by rivals.<sup>72</sup>

Portsmouth’s on-field experiences also meant that Portsmouth hooligans experienced hooligan firms in all of the divisions. Armstrong writes that Sheffield United and Sheffield Wednesday hooligans had the

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<sup>69</sup> Pennant, C. and M. Smith (2007), *Want Some Aggro?: the True Story of West Ham’s First Guv’nors*, paperback edition (London: John Blake Publishing).

<sup>70</sup> Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West\\_Ham\\_United\\_F.C.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Ham_United_F.C.) [accessed 16 December 2010].

<sup>71</sup> Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*.

<sup>72</sup> Allan, J. (1989), *Bloody Casuals: Diary of a Football Hooligan* (Elton: Famedram Publishers), p. 76; Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 148.

same experience as well as the reverse experience of their team being promoted.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, a Portsmouth fan's opinions on 1970s and 1980s soccer violence are especially important. Pennant and Silvester, consistent with the "popular" unemployment theory of hooliganism, point to the layoffs and decline in work prospects on the Portsmouth docks in the 1980s and suggest that it was a factor fuelling the growth and activities of the 6.57 Crew if only in the sense that it gave people more "free time" to attend away and mid-week matches.<sup>74</sup> Several names are given by Pennant and Silvester of key 6.57 Crew members who suffered unemployment in the city in the 1980s.<sup>75</sup>

### ***More on the Marxist approach***

Consistent with the Marxist approach is the fact that firm members enjoy it when the police, as representatives of the state and the ruling-class, waste time and resources policing hooligans. Fans also love the irony when the police at times must protect one group of fans from another. It is nice to feel loved and protected even or especially when the attitude is grudging. Hooligans seem to appreciate that the behaviour of hooligans has created an outcome where police resources are now being used to protect fans who are also hooligans. One perhaps sub-conscious reason for hooligans to fight might have been to mock police and waste police resources, which is much harder to do as an individual or as a small group. People then revel in the power that the crowd gives them. This theorization is not inconsistent with the Marxist approach broadly defined. The established order is also inverted when hooligans feature on TV and in the newspapers when, in the fans' regular week-day capacity as employees or as unemployed, such events would be unimaginable. In Peru, where the "barras bravas" are most closely integrated with regular neighbourhood gangs, which exist in dynamic two-way interaction with the soccer firms, Panfichi and Thieroldt state that: "almost all the complaints filed with the police [about hooligans] refer to damage to property that *symbolises social division* [and exclusion]: cars, windows of houses and smarter shops, and jewellery and the stealing of wallets".<sup>76</sup> Likewise, one of the main reasons behind

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

6.57 Crew's pitch invasion at a friendly match in France was to protest against the inept club leadership, clearly a *ruling-class target* within capitalism. Therefore, the generalized argument that "football fans fight each other and not the ruling-class" is not enough to render a Marxist approach completely invalid.

To further amplify on the relevance of Marxism for hooliganism it is important to recall that Marxist theorists, influenced by Freudianism, have argued in the past that the working-class *instinctively* rebels against the rule of capital.<sup>77</sup> This means it is possible to be fighting capitalism and its effects without even being (consciously) aware of what you are doing! In his 1859 Preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx writes that: "mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve".<sup>78</sup> Civil disobedience by soccer firm members was a task that could be accomplished whereas more direct and violent acts against the British state are only likely to result in defeat. The meagre long-term concrete results of the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) systematic terror campaign, not to mention a century of Communist Party struggle in Western Europe, are testimony to this assertion. French philosopher Alain Badiou<sup>79</sup> writes that: "Lenin already knew that any modern State, including the socialist one, is intrinsically bourgeois".<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Marx writes that: "social reforms are never achieved because of the weakness of the strong but are always the result of the power of the weak".<sup>81</sup> Now that policing technology and resources have dramatically increased hooliganism becomes less feasible and worthwhile and this is a key reason for its decline and near disappearance.

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<sup>76</sup> Panfichi, A. and J. Thieroldt (2002), "Barras Bravas: representation and crowd violence in Peruvian football", in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), p. 154, emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> Cliff, T. (1996), "Trotsky on substitutionism", in Callinicos, A. (Ed.), *Party and Class: Essays by Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Leon Trotsky*, (London: Bookmarks), p. 74; Harman, C. (1996), "Party and class", in Callinicos, A. (Ed.), *Party and Class: Essays by Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Leon Trotsky* (London: Bookmarks), p. 32; James, K. (2009), *A Radical Approach to Accounting Education: Educating the Whole Person as a Response to the Business Crises of Tomorrow* (Saarbrücken: VDM-Verlag Publishing House), p. 150; Merleau-Ponty, M. (1969), *Humanism and Terror* (Boston: Beacon Press), pp. 112-3.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Marx cited in Bosteels, B. (2010), "The leftist hypothesis: communism in the age of terror", in Douzinas, C. and Žižek, S. (Eds.), *The Idea of Communism* (London and New York: Verso), p. 45.

<sup>79</sup> Badiou, A. (2009), *Theory of the Subject*, Bosteels, B. (Trans.) (London and New York: Continuum), p. 235.

<sup>80</sup> Alain Badiou cited in Bosteels, "The leftist hypothesis", p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> Karl Marx cited in *Ibid.*, p. 58.

When 1980s hooligans attacked the police and public property, were they expressing an awareness, if only subconscious, of Friedrich Engels'<sup>82</sup> assertion that: "The modern State, in whatever form it takes, is essentially a capitalist machinery, it is the State of capitalists, the ideal collective capitalist"?<sup>83</sup> For the Slovenian post-communist philosopher Slavoj Žižek, the "underground spectral life of the ghosts of failed utopias" continues to haunt the present generation, "patiently awaiting their next resurrection".<sup>84</sup> Failed utopias include the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1965-68, and the French student movement and factory strikes of May 1968. Antonio Negri writes in his *Goodbye Mr Socialism* that: "One has to bring capital to recognize the weight and importance of the common good, and if capital is not ready to do it, one has to compel it to do so".<sup>85</sup> The calendar year 2010, for example, witnessed the Red Shirt riots in Thailand; the anti-austerity protestors in Greece and Ireland; and mayhem and civil disturbance on a large scale by university students in London.

Of course Marxism is only ever a partial explanation for hooliganism and, of course, I do not claim that the majority of hooligans the majority of the time is or were (consciously) fighting capitalism. I do suggest that there may have been a partly or wholly subconscious (and completely reasonable) desire to resist a power base that has alienated working-class hardcore soccer supporters from their true humanity and has utilized the doctrine of private property to exclude them from a just share of the UK's (and the football industry's) wealth and prosperity. Hooliganism was one way that a protest could be registered and police resources wasted which stood a reasonable chance of success or only marginal losses on any given match-day (or at least that used to be the case in the era we are discussing).

In more recent years the rising ticket prices and the move to all-seater stadiums and new corporatist leagues such as Australia's A-League have further alienated working-class supporters because the corporatized administrators of the game offer soccer matches and "the

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<sup>82</sup> Engels, F. (2004), *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: International Publishers).

<sup>83</sup> Friedrich Engels cited in Bosteels, "The leftist hypothesis", p. 61.

<sup>84</sup> Žižek, S. (2009), *In Defense of Lost Causes*, paperback edition (London and New York: Verso), p. 207.

<sup>85</sup> Negri, T. (2006), *Goodbye Mr Socialism* (Rome: Feltrinelli), p. 235.

brand” to “consumers” as simply another capitalist entertainment product.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps one reason why people in their late-20s and early-30s drift away from hooliganism is that they become integrated within the capitalist system as (higher) wage-earners or entrepreneurs with mortgages and other financial commitments. They can then afford the better season seats in the stadium and they settle down into “consumer” mode.

Armstrong only discusses leaving hooliganism in terms of changing life-stages without also referring to people’s changed position in relation to capital.<sup>87</sup> Armstrong uses the word “capitalism” in mocking inverted quotation marks as if to question either the concept or its relevance or both.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, when he talks about rising ticket prices and the social control of the supporters this is within the context, which he does not acknowledge, of professional football moving to a higher stage of capitalism where supporters are re-classified as “consumers”. Armstrong also rejects the Althusserian concept of *Ideological State Apparatuses* and the related idea that schools, police, courts, politicians, and media all operate, in the last instance, to further and safeguard the interests of capital. However, the physical rebuilding of Sheffield United’s Bramall Lane ground indeed shows the ideological re-interpellation of supporters as consumers whereby the consumers’ average spend becomes more important than their degree of passionate commitment. In fact, the traditional supporters’ passionate commitment is turned against them by the ruling-class of football so that that passion is now viewed as a liability which must be monitored and controlled.

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<sup>86</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*; Hallinan, C. and T. Heenan (2013), “Australia, Asia and the New Football Opportunity”, *Soccer & Society*, DOI: 10.1080/14660970.2013.792479, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, see, for example, p. 311.

### ***Fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” (Armstrong and Hughson)***

Next, I move on to review the ethnographic academic research on hooliganism that began in the 1990s with two landmark PhD theses, one in the UK by Gary Armstrong on Sheffield United’s Blades hooligan firm (later published as *Football Hooligans – Knowing the Score*) and one in Australia by John Hughson on Sydney United’s Bad Blue Boys NSL firm from the early-1990s. A subsequent article by Hughson synthesizes key findings of these two studies and relates some of Armstrong’s key findings to the unique context of south-west Sydney’s Bad Blue Boys (BBB), a group of Croatian-Australian teenagers who are, or perhaps were, hardcore supporters of the former NSL’s Sydney Croatia club (which was renamed Sydney United in the 1990s). It should be pointed out that these “anthropological” authors have been criticized on a number of grounds by other academic researchers.<sup>89</sup> Armstrong has also criticized the early-dominant Leicester University School approach of Dunning and Williams.<sup>90</sup>

Using the anthropological approach, Armstrong focuses on the disorganized nature of Sheffield United’s Blades’ firm and the fluidity of group membership.<sup>91</sup> People come to and go from the Blades according to the needs of their lives at particular stages and no-one is ever “bound” to the Blades in any sense. People connected with the Blades acknowledge that hooliganism is an acquired taste and a profession at the edge of even hardcore fan support.<sup>92</sup> Armstrong<sup>93</sup> talks in terms of fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” and this terminology and its associated logic is taken up by Hughson in his ethnographic study of Sydney United’s BBB. Armstrong disputes the hegemonic theory of the police and the media that hooligan firms are extremely organized armies. The popular hooligan literature, including Pennant and Silvester<sup>94</sup>, largely supports Armstrong’s observation although firms did vary both over time and across the UK in terms of their levels of organization. Pennant and Silvester cite one person who was called “The General” but only in a

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Dunning et al., “Towards a sociological understanding”.

<sup>90</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Allan, *Casuals*, p. 109.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>94</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.



humorous sense after he had been alleged to be “the general” by the police.<sup>95</sup>

Armstrong points out that firm allegiance is bounded and held in tight check. It is generally subordinated to ordinary relationships so that a Blades member would put to one side (or suppress) his hostility towards Sheffield Wednesday’s “Owls” hooligans when relating in the normal way to friends, family members, and work colleagues.<sup>96</sup> When Blades and Owls meet outside of match days the context is often ambiguous and people have to determine whether this is a “football context” where fighting is justified or not. When groups of Blades or Owls invade each other’s pubs on London Road or West Street on a Friday night this is a football context whereas if Blades or Owls are socializing with women or with non-hooligan mates this is not a football context and so football-related violence is unacceptable.

Similarly, Blades and Owls rarely meet outside of the football season<sup>97</sup> because such meetings are ambiguous and hard to interpret as being football-related. Armstrong writes as follows: [T]he *raison d’être* of the Blades was a football match, and a *collective* identity more or less died outside the football season, to be resurrected at the early August pre-season friendly games”.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, it was *possible* for the Blades’ collective identity to assert itself as dominant at gatherings outside of the football season such as a marriage celebration and a 30<sup>th</sup>-birthday celebration.<sup>99</sup> Armstrong states as follows: “Blade identity *could* therefore be automatically sustained away from the club and the match in other contexts that did not need a game of football [nor even the football season]”.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, the West Perth cheer squad met only once outside of football seasons - when Mike C., Pete C., and I arranged to attend a one-day domestic cricket match at the WACA Ground in East Perth. However, this was early in the cricket season (October or November) and the planning to meet took place at the last West Perth football game of the year. In effect, this cricket match can be seen as a special one-day extension of the football season. Further meetings

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268, emphasis original.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270, emphasis original.

between the three cheer squad members did not continue past this one match into the rest of that summer.

### **Social class**

In terms of the socio-economic background of English hooligans, Armstrong's view differs somewhat to that of the Leicester University School. Armstrong et al.<sup>101</sup>, proponents of the anthropological approach, support the "working class in general thesis" whereas Dunning et al.<sup>102</sup> state that "the core football hooligans come predominantly from the *rougher sections* of the working-class".<sup>103</sup> The Leicester University School's term "core football hooligans" is relevant when discussing that School's "phases of hooliganism" theory which I return to later in this chapter. That theory can be used to analyse the extent and speed of the diffusion of hooligan behaviours and styles to other parts of Europe and around the world. Like violence at American professional sports matches, Australian Rules' violence has not passed beyond the first stage of (occasional) "spectator disorderliness"<sup>104</sup> and it is unlikely to do so in the future. However, this does not mean that the "illusion of violence" is not present.

### **Degrees of organization (Armstrong and Hughson)**

The early (proto-)firms of late-1960s and early-1970s Britain were, literally, neighbourhood gangs joined up together into very loose alliances on match days. The Mile End Mob, known for its famous "Mile End" chant on train station platforms en route to Upton Park E13, fits into this proto-firm category<sup>105</sup> as do the earlier versions of Portsmouth-based proto-firms prior to the 6.57 Crew. These proto-firms were

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<sup>101</sup> Armstrong and Harris, "Football hooliganism"; Hobbs, D. and D. Robins (1991), "The boy done good: football violence, changes and continuities", *Sociological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 551-9.

<sup>102</sup> Dunning et al., "Anthropological versus sociological approaches"; Dunning, E. (1994), "The social roots of football hooliganism: a reply to the critics of the 'Leicester School'" in Giulianotti, R., Bonney, M. and Hepworth, M. (Eds.), *Football Violence and Social Identity* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 128-57.

<sup>103</sup> Dunning et al. cited in Astrinakis, A. E. (2002), "Subcultures of hard-core fans in West Attica: an analysis of some central research findings", in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), p. 91, emphasis added.

<sup>104</sup> Roversi and Balestri, "Italian ultras today", p. 131.

<sup>105</sup> Pennant and Smith, *Want some Aggro?*

generally more disorganized than the “casual” firms of the 1980s who gave up working-class skinhead gear for the designer-wear “casual” style of the Italian ultras (an interesting case of diffusion of fashion moving in the opposite direction from the usual trend). John O’Kane explains that Celtic’s firm formed as a literal amalgamation of neighbourhood Glasgow (non-soccer) gangs.<sup>106</sup> Celtic’s firm was formed to counter the earlier formation of other firms such as Aberdeen Soccer Casuals. The behaviour of Aberdeen’s firm in “invading” Glasgow and causing mayhem and damage was seen by Celtic people as damaging the reputation and health of Glasgow and the pride of the Celtic club. Clearly then Celtic’s firm, later one of the top five in Scotland, was formed *in response to* Aberdeen Soccer Casuals. It was not a move adopted purely for the sake of initiating violence. The formation of Celtic Soccer Crew is consistent with Dunning’s thesis of firms being aimed at safeguarding the reputation and pride of a district.<sup>107</sup>

Pennant and Silvester, likewise, document that the Portsmouth proto-firms became much harder and more self-disciplined and organized as a result of invasions by Millwall fans in the late-1960s, invasions which went largely unchallenged at the time.<sup>108</sup> Millwall was the first firm to operate in the late-1960s in the same way that the typical firm operated post-1974. Bill Gardner of the ICF also claims that the ICF was formed in response to a lack of safety for West Ham people especially on travels north when, in pre-ICF days, sometimes as few as 20 Hammers might make the longest of the away trips.<sup>109</sup>

In one-club cities, such as Aberdeen, Airdrie, Ayr, Cardiff, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Motherwell, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Sunderland, and Swansea, firms have often been stronger than in two-club or multiple-club cities because identity of club and city are conflated and this simplifies matters. It also reduces the chance of having to relate regularly to opposition firm members in ambiguous non-football contexts. Dunning et al.<sup>110</sup> claim that one weakness of Armstrong’s work<sup>111</sup> is his failure to take into account sufficiently the special reality of Sheffield as a two-club city. Armstrong’s book shows that the *priority* of Blades football-

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<sup>106</sup> O’Kane, *Celtic Soccer Crew*.

<sup>107</sup> Dunning, *Sport Matters*.

<sup>108</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>109</sup> Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*.

<sup>110</sup> Dunning et al., “Towards a sociological understanding”, p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

wise was *always* to confront Owls and these confrontations often occurred on Friday nights in and around city-centre pubs when visiting club supporters from outside the city had not yet even arrived in Sheffield for their Saturday fixture(s).<sup>112</sup>

Throughout their lives, 6.57 Crew of Portsmouth and the predecessor proto-firms were as disorganized as they come, according to Pennant and Silvester.<sup>113</sup> Planning never amounted to more than “let’s meet at such-and-such a pub at 11am on game day”. The firm’s name comes from the time that the morning train left Portsmouth Station to transport fans to away games. The train would pick up the various sub-gangs, essentially just neighbourhood gangs, which lived in housing estates on the edge of Portsmouth or in neighbouring towns. “Pompey” fans were spread along the south coast to as far away as Reading. On a good day there might have been as many as 700 “Pompey” fans on the 6.57 train although this would have included ordinary, non-hooligan fans (“scarvers”). The 6.57 Crew had no leader but there were a recognizable 200 or 300 people that knew each other at least by sight. The top 30 or 50 in any firm were called the “top boys” and it was necessary that they were on hand when major trouble began.

### ***The sub-gangs***

The various sub-gangs of the 6.57 Crew had their own very informal structures and usually people spent time within their own sub-gangs unless they were split up in unforeseen circumstances in which cases the “lost” people would hook up with other sub-gangs. Each sub-gang was associated with a particular government housing project in or on the periphery of Portsmouth. Each sub-gang also had one or more key pubs on its territory from which people would depart from and return to on match days and congregate in at other times. Similarly, in Armstrong’s book, he indicates that there were Rotherham Blades (from the nearby town) and Village Blades which were both sub-gangs of the larger BBC (Blades Business Crew).<sup>114</sup> The formation of football crews as amalgamations of neighbourhood gangs may have had a side-effect in certain cases of reducing violence between such neighbourhood gangs.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>114</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

Marsh explains as follows: "By channelling the competitive hostility outwards towards the tribe on the other side of the [usually metaphorical] hill, social bonds within one's own group are reaffirmed and maintained".<sup>115</sup>

Books by ICF leaders Pennant and Gardner suggest that the ICF was one of the more organized and self-disciplined firms. This factor probably goes a long way towards explaining its great "success".<sup>116</sup> Bill Gardner was the recognized leader and Cass Pennant and Andy Swallow were the deputies. At the fringe of the main firm was a sub-firm called the "Under 5s", a group of younger teenaged fans who were often more reckless and foolhardy than the elder ones. The 6.57 Crew or its proto-firms rarely met the ICF or its proto-firms as the two clubs generally played in different divisions in the 1970s and 1980s. Pennant and Silvester talk about one confrontation in London between a Portsmouth firm and Andy Swallow and a group of "tooled-up" Under 5s representing the ICF.<sup>117</sup> The ICF was organized enough that its strategies were fairly well-developed in advance. Furthermore, drinking in pubs before games, which would reduce fighting ability, was not usually part of its routine.

### ***Casual nature of group ties (Armstrong and Hughson)***

Armstrong emphasizes the casual nature of group ties and the recognition that a person was not morally bound to the firm in any way if he / she decided to give up football or give up hooliganism as part of a natural evolution within his / her own personal life.<sup>118</sup> Some people might "come out of retirement" for big matches against the Owls or if a confrontation came to them.<sup>119</sup> They would often continue to go to games and London Road Friday night pub sessions but sit with non-hooligan mates or sit with Blades but not leave the pub to meet a challenge outside.<sup>120</sup> Generally, Hughson's research of BBB supports this. He tells the humorous example of one Croatian-Australian hooligan with his girlfriend being ridiculed by the group for his love interest to the extent that over time he, and others in similar positions, disappeared to

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<sup>115</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*; Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*.

<sup>117</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>118</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 266.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

the fringes of the group or left it entirely. This hooligan was taunted by the Croatian word for “slippers” which signifies domestic bliss and a certain married lifestyle. Key members of the BBB at Sydney United and the MCF at Melbourne Knights believe that one’s obviously displayed loyalty should be to the firm, to the soccer club, and to the Croatian community. The fault-line here is the ethnic and religious tension between Croatia and Serbia. This fault-line has replaced, except in the memories of those who were involved, the earlier fault-line between the pro-independence supporters of sister clubs Melbourne Croatia (now Melbourne Knights) and Sydney Croatia (now Sydney United) and the teams then associated with the ruling Yugoslavian Communist Party namely Footscray JUST in Melbourne (now defunct) and Yugal in Sydney.<sup>121</sup> An additional fault-line today is between the Croatian-Australian youth at MCF, and successor firms to the BBB in Western Sydney such as South West Firm and Edensor Park Ultras, and “mainstream” assimilated and Anglo-Celtic Australians who support “non-ethnic” A-League clubs, Australian Rules, and / or rugby league clubs.<sup>122</sup>

### ***The “phases of hooliganism” theory (Leicester University School)***

I now move on to discuss the “phases of hooliganism” theory as outlined in various places by Dunning and his Leicester University School. In the first phase, Dunning argues that violence mostly involved attacks on players and officials. It emerged from uncontrolled passions inspired directly by events on the field.<sup>123</sup> This type of violence, referred to as “spectator disorderliness” by Roversi and Balestri, was not pre-planned.<sup>124</sup> Duke and Slepíčka explain that, in the pre-1946 or pre-communist era in the then Czechoslovakia:

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<sup>121</sup> James, K., Tolliday, C. and R. Walsh (2011), “Where to now, Melbourne Croatia?: Football Federation Australia’s use of accounting numbers to institute exclusion upon ethnic clubs”, *Asian Review of Accounting*, Vol. 19, No. 2, p. 114; Nimac, I., Dušević, Š., Lozina, L. and T. Nimac (2008), *More than the Game: 50 Years of Sydney United* (Edensor Park: Sydney United Football Club).

<sup>122</sup> In Sydney this situation has been confused somewhat by the remarkable off-field success enjoyed by new A-League club Western Sydney Wanderers beginning in the 2012-13 season.

<sup>123</sup> Duke, V. and P. Slepíčka (2002), “Bohemian rhapsody: football supporters in the Czech Republic”, in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), p. 60.

<sup>124</sup> Roversi and Balestri, “Italian ultras today”, p. 131.

“most of the crowd incidents ... were match related. Attacks on players and officials were characteristic of football spectator behaviour in the first Czechoslovak republic. Battles between groups of rival fans were not common, and there were no reported examples of the police coming under attack from gangs of fans”.<sup>125</sup>

After the 1960s “core football hooliganism” emerged in England which was rival gangs of super-fighters intent on fighting each other; in this phase the violence was often pre-meditated.<sup>126</sup> Through a process of diffusion, the English hooligan style aka the “English disease” diffused firstly to Western Europe in the 1970s<sup>127</sup> and later to communist or post-communist Eastern Europe. In the then Czechoslovakia, Dunning’s second phase did not diffuse into the local setting until the mid-1980s.<sup>128</sup> The reason for the slow diffusion was “because of the relative isolation, restricted media coverage and rigorous repression under the communist regimes”.<sup>129</sup>

Duke and Slepíčka also allege that communist rule was associated, especially in its early years, with a reduction in all types of soccer violence.<sup>130</sup> Spectator disorderliness decreased from its pre-communist levels and core hooliganism started much later and on a much lesser scale in the then Czechoslovakia compared to Western Europe. Duke and Slepíčka attribute this to mass communist repression being effective in its early years but declining in its effectiveness by the 1980s.<sup>131</sup> It was not until the 1990s that the new Czech Republic experienced its first cases of fan attacks upon police.<sup>132</sup> Overall, Duke and Slepíčka conclude that “[d]evelopments in the Czech Republic occurred later both in terms of the degree of organisation involved and the nature of the violence”.<sup>133</sup> This suggests that hooliganism diffuses at different speeds and to various extents to different regions and that some types of hooliganism are never diffused to some locations. As with North American professional sport crowds<sup>134</sup>, I argue that Australian Rules’ crowds have

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<sup>125</sup> Duke and Slepíčka, “Bohemian rhapsody”, p. 52.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>127</sup> Duke, V. and L. Crolley (1996), *Football, Nationality and the State* (London: Longman); *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>134</sup> Young, K. (2002), “A walk on the wild side: exposing North American sports crowd disorder”, in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football*

not moved beyond the Leicester University School's "spectator disorderliness" phase and are unlikely to do so in the future given top-level Australian sports' increasing mimicking of the North American professional sport culture and the ideological re-positioning of the supporter as consumer.

The Leicester University School's "phases" theory has been developed beyond that discussed in Duke and Slepíčka and explained in the previous paragraph.<sup>135</sup> According to Dunning et al., there were three phases of English soccer hooliganism in the post-war era.<sup>136</sup> Firstly, in the 1950s and 1960s, "the conflicts on the terraces were interpersonal in character, took place mainly in the soccer grounds and on trains, and were for the most part directly related to the outcome of the match".<sup>137</sup> Secondly, during the 1970s, "football hooliganism was transformed into mass violence, which took place outside as well as inside the grounds and took the form of violent collective, or crowd, behaviour".<sup>138</sup> During the last phase, since the 1980s, "hooligan violence has been displaced from the grounds and diffused into city centres, suburbs and even further away from the ground itself and may take place independently of the outcome of the game, for fighting can begin before or after the game and can continue for a long time".<sup>139</sup>

It is better to view these phases tentatively as suggesting a broad trend line and they should not be taken too literally. There was fighting outside of English grounds in the 1970s although, in that era, attempting to take over the opposing fans' end was an important ritual. Roughly, and in terms of fashion, the second phase was the "skinhead era" and the third phase was the "casuals' era". Portsmouth hardcore supporters, interviewed by Pennant and Silvester, talk of an away game ritual which involved going first to a pub near the main train station and then heading to the city-centre looking for the rival firm or sub-gangs of that firm.<sup>140</sup> Fans taking the 6.57 train would reach London by mid-morning and the

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*Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), pp. 201-17.

<sup>135</sup> Duke and Slepíčka, "Bohemian rhapsody"

<sup>136</sup> Dunning et al., "Anthropological versus sociological approaches", cited in Astrinakis, "Sub-culture of hard-core fans", p. 102.

<sup>137</sup> Dunning et al., "Anthropological versus sociological approaches", cited in Astrinakis, "Sub-culture of hard-core fans", p. 102.

<sup>138</sup> Dunning et al., "Anthropological versus sociological approaches", cited in Astrinakis, "Sub-culture of hard-core fans", p. 102.

<sup>139</sup> Dunning et al., "Anthropological versus sociological approaches", cited in Astrinakis, "Sub-culture of hard-core fans", p. 102.

<sup>140</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.



north of England by 1pm so violence could occur well before the standard 3pm kick-off time. The timing of the violence and the entrance to the away team's city became important parts of strategy which began in the 1970s but which was further refined in the 1980s. Another key element of strategy was exiting at a different train station than the one expected and then walking the rest of the way. Attempts to take ends died down as a fashion by 1980 as security and policing methods improved. In Pennant and Silvester's book there are chapters that discuss what the Leicester University School refers to in terms of fighting taking place in "city-centres" or "suburbs".<sup>141</sup> Fights in London would occur frequently, either on a pre-mediated or a spontaneous basis, as supporters of south-of-England teams returning from a day in the north would all arrive back in London at Euston Station. Here they would also meet north-of-England hooligans who had followed their team down to London or to the south coast.<sup>142</sup> Portsmouth fans, before returning to the south coast often in the early hours, would congregate in the evenings around Covent Gardens before heading to Waterloo Station. As a result, fights also took place in these three locations.<sup>143</sup>

Portsmouth supporters were also sometimes involved in hooliganism at matches not involving their club. This was not commonly done by other firms (except for the ICF and Hibernian's Capital City Service) and it shows a higher level of both strategic thought and determination to engage in confrontation. The 6.57 Crew would sometimes attend Millwall home games to trouble the home fans or otherwise go to the hated Southampton to join forces with the away team firm. This was more often done in cases of early or late kick-offs for the Portsmouth game or as spontaneous last-minute responses to cancelled Portsmouth matches. Often only sub-gangs of a firm would take such trips with other sub-gangs hitting the London pubs. As mentioned, the ICF also, on some occasions, went to games not involving their team. This also included support for small local baby brothers Leyton Orient, a support generally neither appreciated nor reciprocated by Orient fans.

The ICF also did not join in with the combined firm on the "England scene" that was mainly made up of mostly Chelsea and Manchester

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 188.

<sup>143</sup> Allan, *Casuals*, p. 64; *Ibid.*

United hooligans. On the few occasions when it did attend England games, the ICF would, in its characteristic iconoclastic fashion, confuse everybody by going “as West Ham” rather than “as England”. This action suggests that the conscious mental framing of group identity in advance was strategically important since it was a major influence upon both one’s own group’s actions and how the group was perceived by others. This mental collective framing of group identity “as West Ham” gave the group the right to take on any firm or gang that it wanted to take on including those usually associated with other English clubs. The ICF would not allow for peaceful breaks in fighting for occasions such as English games which perhaps indicates the higher level of seriousness with which the ICF viewed its activities.

In Australian Rules, Port Adelaide Magpies supporters might be seen as one of the most hardcore groups preferring a hostile attitude or front over a peaceful or fraternal attitude or front (at least in the 1980s because things have changed very much since then). Using the Marxist terms, the ICF, being self-consciously reflexive, was clearly a “group-for-itself” and not merely a “group-in-itself”. As mentioned, to go “as West Ham” rather than “as England” suggests a reasonably sophisticated pre-planned group self-awareness and self-identity. Violence is still rightly termed “soccer hooliganism” when the soccer clubs are still *the key entities in view* or the key fields of reference for identity formation for self and others. West Ham is a stronger form of identity for many fans who consciously still acknowledge the club and think in terms of their connection with it on those match days when England is playing rather than West Ham. On such days many other supporters do not think in terms of club affiliation. Perhaps England identification is only powerful enough to fuel identities and actions for those groups or people sufficiently high up in an “England hierarchy” so that their England identities are happily taken on and club identities put to one side for the day. Club, country, and political loyalties can be harmonized too as when pro-British Chelsea, Millwall, and Rangers fans combine.

West Ham supporters may feel excluded from the England supporter hierarchy so they cling on to West Ham identity on the days when England plays and then claim and maintain the worldview that club and district identification should override national identification. This requires a relatively sophisticated mental and emotional adherence to a

concept (West Ham) that becomes invisible on match days of England games but which the fans still respond to and treat as real. They thus force supporters of other clubs to give *mental space* to “West Ham” on England match days. The same “mental warfare” happened when Millwall fans invaded grounds at non-Millwall matches. The presence of Millwall’s Bushwackers caused the Millwall club to invade people’s mental processes in a way that mirrored the Bushwackers’ physical invasion of other teams’ streets and grounds.

The Leicester University School’s “phases” categorization fails to take into account the alleged general hardening up of attitudes and behaviours in England which took place around 1974. We recall that Pennant and Silvester nominate 1974 as a key dividing year in terms of attitudes.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps the 1950s and 1960s phase should be seen as extending as late as 1974.

If there is a fourth phase to be added, for the 1990s and 2000s, I suggest that it might be called the “internet era”. In this extremely self-conscious and politically-correct post-modern era, past events are mythologized, rationalized, and justified online and in the pages of the myriad cheap-paperback “confessions” books penned by now 40-year-old or 50-year-old ex-hooligans. In the present era violence is reserved for a few important strategic self- and others-defining clashes such as West Ham versus Millwall and Arsenal versus Tottenham. Only the uncool northerners or Welshmen continue with hooligan activities on a regular basis. Armstrong ends his book by describing how Blades would sometimes in 1997 watch games at pubs close to the Bramall Lane ground partly as a protest against rising ticket prices.<sup>145</sup> This is the beginning of, in Armstrong’s words, “post-fan” behaviour.<sup>146</sup> Armstrong’s data ends in 1997 and so we do not know how the Blades are functioning in the new millennium. Generally rising season ticket prices and the rising cost of train travel have meant that the demographic of football support has changed while improved policing methods are a further factor in creating disinterest in hooliganism.

Armstrong also produces very interesting data in the form of a list compiled in April 1987 of 190 Blades with ages, occupations, and criminal record (if any) listed.<sup>147</sup> He classifies these into sub-gangs and,

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<sup>144</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>145</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 322.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

as with our West Perth cheer squad (see Appendix A for a list of West Perth cheer squad sub-gangs), sub-gangs might have had as few as two or three members. Larger sub-gangs which were part of the Blades include Old Lads, Drug Squad, Suicide Squad, Max's Coach Blades, Villagers, and Rotherham Blades. These last two groups were the most obviously separate since their outside-of-Sheffield locations influenced how they viewed themselves, other Blades, and other firms, and also influenced their willingness to fight. They felt that certain City Blades were too close to certain City Owls and hence sometimes not willing to confront them. Clearly, the out-of-Sheffield Blades were more idealistic and less pragmatic than the City Blades. Being from outside-of-Sheffield it was easier for them to cause trouble and then run away to the relative safety of Rotherham or their villages. Armstrong also recounts the interesting and ironic case of Rotherham Blades fighting Rotherham Owls or outside supporters and, in doing so, defending the honour of a city they do not live in.<sup>148</sup> The present book follows Armstrong's example. Appendix A lists the West Perth cheer squad's various sub-gangs and the members belonging to each.

### ***The ethics of hooliganism***

One remaining topic that should be discussed, and most likely will interest readers, is the ethics of hooliganism. The best treatments of this are in Gary Armstrong's book; Bill Gardner's book; and John O'Kane's book.<sup>149</sup> By contrast, Cass Pennant tends to be a little quieter on matters of ethics but it is there as an under-current.<sup>150</sup> In Pennant and Silvester's Portsmouth book, a few of the fans who have contributed sections refer to isolated incidents which, in hindsight, they now "regret" or view as "out of order".<sup>151</sup> These events sometimes involved so-called non-hooligans and even non-football people who were simply caught out being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Disturbing a wedding is one incident that one of the contributors regrets. From O'Kane's and Gardner's books we might suggest that hooligan ethics included *not* initiating violence against

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-32.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*; Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*; O'Kane, *Celtic Soccer Crew*.

<sup>150</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*; Pennant, Cass; Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

non-hooligans including ordinary, non-hooligan fans known as “scarfers”.<sup>152</sup> Scarfers have been known to join in fights on occasions usually when their team’s firm has been hopelessly outnumbered. However, scarfers never start trouble. Female fans and men or women with children are also not to be troubled.<sup>153</sup> Wolves’ fans get lambasted by Pennant and Silvester on this score; this is an example of hooligans policing themselves, albeit two decades after the fact.<sup>154</sup>

Armstrong and O’Kane stress that “liberties” should not be taken.<sup>155</sup> In other words, if, by chance or for any other reason, one hooligan is outnumbered by a large group or there is a small group hopelessly outnumbered by a large group, liberties should not be taken and people should disperse. O’Kane’s injunction not to “take liberties” also suggests not going beyond what is strictly necessary to “prove a point”.<sup>156</sup> This relates back to hooliganism being an “illusion of violence” or a ritualistic display of heterosexual masculinity.<sup>157</sup> Deaths and very serious injuries due to hooliganism in British club soccer during the hooligan era were remarkably rare; and Allan makes it clear that no hooligan or casual would desire or aim for the death of another.<sup>158</sup>

Gardner and O’Kane tend to go so far as define themselves through their applied ethics or “code of honour” whereas others refuse to talk about ethics but probably in fact did practise it.<sup>159</sup> Like punk rocker John Lydon aka Johnny Rotten in his 1994 autobiography *Rotten: No Irish, no Blacks, no Dogs*, Gardner and O’Kane may indulge in some post-event justification and rationalization, especially likely by Gardner since he was taken to court as being a “ringleader of the ICF”.<sup>160</sup> However, we do not doubt that there was a code of honour. It was most likely that the code was selectively applied and enforced and certainly many individuals and firms (some firms more than others) were willing to take various liberties and also to attack non-hooligans.

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<sup>152</sup> Allan, *Casuals*, pp. 20, 72, 139.

<sup>153</sup> Allan, *Casuals*, pp. 20, 72, 139; Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>154</sup> Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>155</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*; O’Kane, *Celtic Soccer Crew*.

<sup>156</sup> See also Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

<sup>157</sup> See also *ibid*.

<sup>158</sup> Allan, *Casuals*, p. 77.

<sup>159</sup> Gardner, *Good Afternoon Gentlemen*; O’Kane, *Celtic Soccer Crew*.

<sup>160</sup> Lydon, J., Zimmerman, K. and K. Zimmerman (1994), *Rotten: No Irish, no Blacks, no Dogs* (London: Plexus Publishing).

## ***Lasting impact of hooliganism***

What lasting impact did the soccer hooligan scene have? A good point of comparison might be with the first wave of English punk music, generally defined as 1976-78. If one impetus for hooliganism was the increasing alienation between player and fan and between administrator and fan due to corporatization these trends have continued on unabated since the closing of the hooligan era. Hooliganism of the modern Russian and Polish type is far more brutal than the English ever were. They took English hooliganism literally in the same way that Norwegian Black Metal bands lacked the charm and ironic humour of those pioneering Geordies Venom. However, as an Amazon customer reviewer of Gardner's book, Leonard Etheridge, writes: "Football violence of the late 60s. 70s and 80s can never be replicated, because of how stadiums are built now and security and the onus of bad behavior [sic] being ultimately with the club".<sup>161</sup> As a result, hooliganism has and will constantly continue to seek out new forms.<sup>162</sup> Punk music likewise did not truly challenge capitalism or "overturn the culture industries".<sup>163</sup> Punk culture has become, to some extent, just a niche part of consumer culture (with hand-painted brand-new punk leather jackets being sold on eBay for USD300.00 or more).<sup>164</sup>

However, in both cases, we do not have failed movements. Both movements created new spaces for how people viewed themselves and both created alternative anti-histories and new sociologies. Both created a new breed of heroes and it was not mere carnivalesque inversion for a short period. Both made lasting impacts on the worldviews, values, and self-images of those intimately involved and those involved only on the margins or periphery. Armstrong points out that one positive contribution made by the Blades was to build a community which had an identifiable history; an identifiable collective social memory; and an identifiable self-identity (class-for-itself).<sup>165</sup> This community was a source of support and encouragement for loners and social outcasts as well as for the more gregarious and socially competent Blades. Marsh explains as follows:

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<sup>161</sup> Leonard Etheridge quote cited at Amazon.com [posted 28 July 2007, accessed 8 October 2013].

<sup>162</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 322; Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 87.

<sup>163</sup> Cherry, B. and M. Mellins (2012), "Negotiating the Punk in Steampunk: Subculture, Fashion & Performative Identity", *Post & Post-Punk*, Vol. 1, No. 1, doi:10.1386/punk.1.1.5\_1, p. 23.

<sup>164</sup> Bestley, "From 'London's Burning' to 'Sten Guns in Sunderland'".

<sup>165</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*.

“By channelling the competitive hostility outwards towards the tribe on the other side of the [metaphorical] hill, social bonds within one’s own group are reaffirmed and maintained”.<sup>166</sup> Recently we saw Motherwell Ultras and Edinburgh City Ultras emerge; Edinburgh City Ultras was in the news several times in 2013-2016 with its teenage members fighting Gretna fans and creating a disturbance at a McDonald’s Restaurant. Edinburgh City Football Club decided to introduce a policy of only admitting under-18s with an accompanying adult.<sup>167</sup>

### ***The Australian setting and the (non-)diffusion of core hooliganism***

I now consider why “core football hooliganism” (Dunning’s term) has never been diffused successfully to Australia. There has been occasional Australian Rules’ crowd violence of the “first phase” type referred to as “spectator disorderliness”. This type involves isolated attacks on players and umpires emerging out of passions generated by the match itself. Most Australian Rules’ reference books suggest that these incidents occurred more frequently in the sport’s early years prior to World War I.<sup>168</sup> They do not appear to have grown more serious or frequent as the years have passed. Violence has tended to involve mostly either ordinary supporters from the terraces or paid-up club members rather than cheer squad members. The dominant culture at Victorian and South Australian cheer squads, since the formation of the first cheer squad at VFL/AFL club Richmond in 1959<sup>169</sup>, has included an important fraternal ethos among rival cheer squad members away from the football grounds.

In the peak cheer squad years of the then VFL/AFL in the 1970s and 1980s, when the VFL was essentially a Melbourne suburban competition plus Geelong, cheer squad members from different clubs would catch up with each other after games at Flinders Street Station and shout across station platforms the scores from their respective grounds. There was also a place called Classic Cafe in Melbourne city-

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<sup>166</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 50.

<sup>167</sup> Source: <http://www.deadlinenews.co.uk/2013/04/29/59480/> [accessed 5 January 2017] and <http://www.scotsman.com/news/extra-police-to-tackle-football-thugs-1-2912864> [accessed 5 January 2017]; and <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/much-teen-spirit-edinburgh-city-7881634> [accessed 5 January 2017].

<sup>168</sup> Critchley, *Our Footy*, Chapter 12.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

centre where cheer squad members congregated and interacted on Saturday nights after the regular Saturday afternoon home-and-away games.<sup>170</sup> If anything, cheer squad members have been less violent than ordinary supporters of Australian Rules' clubs. A distinction has been made between inner and outer cheer squads at clubs such as Collingwood<sup>171</sup> where the inner cheer squad was the approved membership that adhered to fraternal cheer squad ethics whereas the outer cheer squad was the hooligan element not under the restraining influence of the cheer squad leaders. However, I argue that, despite this, the "illusion of violence" has always been important for Victorian and South Australian cheer squads.

### ***Western Australian cheer squads of the mid-1980s***

The fraternal Victorian cheer squad culture merged with the outwardly more aggressive English soccer hooligan culture, which regularly appeared on Australian TV news reports, to create the ethos of groups such as our West Perth cheer squad in Western Australia. I had sat and stood with Victorian and South Australian cheer squads at games and absorbed some of their fraternal ethics. The leading cheer squads in WAFL football in 1984 and 1985 were Perth, Claremont, Subiaco, West Perth, and East Perth, probably in that order or with West Perth as third. None of the remaining three WAFL clubs had semi-organized cheer squads as far as the key people were aware.

The largest and best organized cheer squad was Perth Football Club's under the leadership of a very warm, cheerful, and sophisticated metro-sexual guy with blond-rinse hair called Nick. Nick brought the disciplined and fraternal Victorian cheer squad ethics over to the Perth Football Club. The Claremont cheer squad was probably similarly influenced by Victorian cheer squads since one of its core members wore a Victorian-style duffel coat with favourite player name and number (Peter 15 Jamieson) and team name emblazoned on the back in iron-on lettering. The duffel coats never caught on in Western Australia as, unlike in South Australia, few school-aged Western Australia supporters then made trips to Melbourne or Adelaide to watch VFL or SANFL

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<sup>170</sup> Muyt, A. (2006), *Maroon and Blue: Recollections and Tales of the Fitzroy Football Club* (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press), p. 139.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.



games, and the only places to see the duffel-coat culture were Melbourne and Adelaide. Furthermore, the Perth winter is milder and was not conducive to a duffel coat culture emerging.

Interestingly, in 1978 and 1982, Melbourne-based VFL supporters wore the duffel coats to school and to the city-centre whereas by 1986 the duffel-coats were bring worn to VFL games only. By the 1990s and the AFL era they had most likely disappeared completely although I have no direct evidence of when they disappeared. Two people from Victoria wore duffel coats with club and player names on the back to my high-school in Perth in 1984-85. There was one Geelong supporter (with a Mike Turner duffel coat) and one Collingwood supporter (with a Peter Moore duffel coat), an excellent choice of players in both cases. The various WAFL cheer squads of the 1980s are discussed further in Chapter 4.

### ***Port Adelaide Magpies' cheer squad and the "illusion of violence"***

An example of the "illusion of violence"<sup>172</sup>among the cheer squads would be at Port Adelaide Magpies. I attended the Port Adelaide versus Central District South Australian National Football League (SANFL) game at Alberton Oval in May 1984. It was a day of driving rain and relentless wind but much of the terracing on the outer side of the ground was full of hardcore Port Adelaide cheer squad members or hooligans in the black Victorian-style duffel coats with favourite players' names and numbers ironed on to the backs in white lettering. The Port Adelaide people were not much concerned at all about the rain, few had umbrellas, and they certainly were a tough mob. Their main hero was a borderline player called David Granger who had been suspended for 18-months for on-field violence. He was renamed "Grave Danger" by the Port Adelaide faithful and by the South Australian media and he served as a cult hero for Port Adelaide fans in the same way that Phil Bradmore was for the West Perth cheer squad. Port Adelaide is one club in the 1980s where there was a harder attitude towards the opposition and relations with other cheer squads were less obviously fraternal. However, never having lived in Adelaide, I would not want to comment further.

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<sup>172</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*.

After this May 1984 game ended I was caught up in the atmosphere of the Port Adelaide crew and, instead of taking the train back to the city-centre, by mistake I was swept along with the crowd taking the train in the other direction north-west to Port Adelaide. After realizing my error I was told by the conductor to stay on the train until it turned around at the end of the line. I made it back to my city-centre hotel at around 8.30pm much to the relief of my waiting family.

During the mid-1990s, Port Adelaide became the second Adelaide-based AFL club. In fact Port Adelaide Power debuted in the AFL in the 1997 season taking up the vacant position that was created by the coerced Fitzroy and Brisbane Bears' merger. However, Port Adelaide had been required by the SANFL to form a separate club to operate Port Adelaide Magpies in the SANFL competition. On 17 November 2010, two journalists announced in the *Adelaide Advertiser* that the SANFL had permitted the two Port Adelaide clubs to merge into one thus overcoming the confusion of the past decade as to which club was "the real Port Adelaide".<sup>173</sup> I thank Dr Susan Briggs of University of South Australia for supplying me with these two articles. The Full Points Footy website comments on the problematic "two clubs" arrangement at Port Adelaide as follows:

"The converse of this, the emergence of two distinct and independent clubs where previously there had only been one, is almost, but not quite, unheard of. It happened most famously in 1996, when the Port Adelaide Football Club, the oldest and most successful in the SANFL, effectively reproduced itself by a kind of fission: one club, henceforth to be known as the Port Adelaide Magpies, would continue to compete in the SANFL, with another achieving elevation to the AFL".<sup>174</sup>

The fact that only the style (to some extent) but not the violence of core football hooliganism has diffused to Australian Rules warrants some explanation. We are on very fraught ground here and all that anyone can do is to speculate. Lynch and Veal, as well as earlier authors Sandercock and Turner, point to the tough physical action on the field of play in Australian Rules (and rugby) meaning that their supporters can experience violence vicariously.<sup>175</sup> The Port Adelaide Magpies'

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<sup>173</sup> Source: Homfray, R. (2010), "Port's big split now consigned to history", *Adelaide Advertiser*, 17 November, pp. 90-1; Partland, W. (2010), "Health of SANFL crucial", *Adelaide Advertiser*, 17 November, p. 91.

<sup>174</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/port\\_adelaide.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/port_adelaide.htm) [accessed 22 December 2010].

supporters' exaltation of "Grave Danger" into a mythical warrior figure who rode roughshod over the normal rules of civilization and weak-kneed opponents from less working-class suburbs is a good example here.

Furthermore, Sandercock and Turner claim that the movement of people to Melbourne's outer suburbs has made the inner-suburban entities reflected in the names of the VFL/AFL clubs no longer the confined tribal areas that the fans easily identify with unlike "Manchester, Leeds or Liverpool".<sup>176</sup> As Sandercock and Turner ask their readers, how does a boy living in Airport West decide which club to follow?<sup>177</sup> This problem was first identified at least as early as the 1960s with respect to certain teams. For example, Frost writes that: "By the 1960s, large numbers of Richmond people and their descendants were living out in the suburbs [i.e. beyond Richmond itself], giving the club an army of latent support".<sup>178</sup> The Melbourne metropolitan area has expanded even further in all directions in the 36 years since the publication of Sandercock and Turner's book in 1981. Former Carlton AFL player Brendan Fevola notes that the metropolitan area extended south-east to Narre Warren in the late-1980s but it now ends another 20 kilometres further out past Pakenham.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, the issue that Sandercock and Turner identified back in 1981 has become even more acute some 36 years later.<sup>180</sup> Sandercock and Turner also note that Australian Rules' crowds have more women than do soccer crowds in the UK and women may be a restraining influence.<sup>181</sup> Lastly, they point out that Australian Rules' crowds arrive in cars to a much greater extent than occurs in UK soccer, and so crowds disperse quickly, and not in masses, after the game ends.<sup>182</sup> People quickly re-enter their own private "bubbles" of space (their motor vehicles) which are extensions of their homes rather than of the football ground. While "[t]he house becomes an extension of the family"<sup>183</sup> the car becomes an extension of the house.

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<sup>175</sup> Lynch and Veal, *Australian Leisure*, p. 259; Sandercock, L. and I. Turner (1981), *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game* (Sydney: Granada), p. 228.

<sup>176</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 228.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>178</sup> Frost, *Immortals*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>179</sup> Fevola, B. (2012), *Fev: In my Own Words*, with Adam McNicol, hardcover edition (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books), p. 17.

<sup>180</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 105.

We can also point to Australia's conservative social and political culture, and the Australian "social contract" associated with Federation in 1901, where it was understood that the three dominant ethnic groups, the English, Irish, and Scots, would have to forget the infighting of the home countries in order to create a new syncretic and homogeneous Australian identity. Furthermore, the number and scale of incidents of political civil disobedience and public riots are very low indeed in Australia unlike the number of ordinary criminal offences such as breaking-and-entering and assault. There has always been an assumption, held by the media and much of the public, that European soccer supporters should not bring their overseas political disputes (such as Croatia versus Serbia) into Australia. This has been the rarely spoken sub-text behind much of the sensationalist and unforgiving tone of mainstream reporters commentating on incidents of violence and alleged violence at Australian soccer games. Now that only "non-ethnic" clubs play in the A-League (with the exception of Brisbane Roar which is a rebadging of Hollandia Inala Soccer Club) it will be interesting to see how vehemently the media reports on any incidents of violence involving A-League supporters.

We could perhaps point also to the "collective unconscious" theory of the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. Australia began as a prison settlement and discipline upon the disobedient was extremely harsh. Furthermore, Australia did not have the same rigid class system as England and ex-convicts could always hope to begin again on their own piece of land. This has created a culture where a successful self-sufficient life is viewed as being within the reach of most law-abiding and hard-working citizens which is our own Australian version of the ideology of the American Dream. Few people indeed want to harm their chances of attaining this success via incarceration and a criminal record. As the Clash wrote in the song "White Riot", "nobody wants to go to jail". Although the rising house prices in major Australian cities in the past 20 years have meant that many Australians are now objectively alienated, in the Marxist sense, from the housing options of their choice, this has not led to any significant rise in either theft offences or in civil disobedience.

Lastly, Bairner puts forward an interesting suggestion. He argues that fans of the native Irish games, such as Gaelic Football and hurling,

in the Irish Republic have not acted out “core hooliganism” because they see these games as having outside enemies in the form of people who support only the British sports.<sup>184</sup> To fight amongst themselves would thus be counter-productive. The fault-line here is not between classes, regions or city versus country but between sports. This may also apply in Australia since Australia is the only country playing Australian Rules on any significant scale, and Australian Rules’ fans want their game to have good press and a good image so that it is not maligned by fans of the rugby codes and soccer. Using this logic it would be counter-productive for Australian Rules’ supporters to fight each other or to damage property because they see themselves as being evangelists for their sport and all evangelists aim at good behaviour.

With the AFL now being increasingly evangelistic or imperialistic, depending on your viewpoint, through setting up new franchises in the traditional rugby-league heartlands of the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney, it is likely that Australian Rules’ fans are now more aware of their evangelistic responsibilities than ever before. In Sydney the Sydney Swans have carved out for themselves a new demographic of supporters who are mostly not ex- or current rugby-league fans. A new demographic has sprung into being that enjoys the unique entertainment experience offered by Sydney Swans’ home games.<sup>185</sup> By contrast, soccer fans, in countries where soccer is hegemonic, do not see any such evangelical role for themselves. For many of them the game and its owners and administrators have reified themselves and are untouchable and unaccountable, ruling ordinary supporters from far above just as the Greek and Roman gods ruled over the people unmercifully from a distance according to the writings of the young Karl Marx.

### ***West Perth cheer squad and the fluidity of group ties***

The West Perth cheer squad’s experiences in Western Australia definitely illustrate Armstrong’s theory about the casual nature of group

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<sup>184</sup> Bairner, A. (2002), “The dog that didn’t bark? Football hooliganism in Ireland”, in Dunning, E., Murphy, P., Waddington, I. and Astrinakis, A. E. (Eds.), *Fighting Fans: Football Hooliganism as a World Phenomenon* (Dublin: University College Press), p. 129.

<sup>185</sup> Rex Walsh (Curtin University, Sydney campus), personal conversation with the author, Sydney, 21 September 2010.

ties and the fluidity of group membership with telephone calls between our members being rare; members knowing most other members only by first name and / or nickname; members usually not knowing where other members lived or if they did know they knew only the suburb name; members meeting only five times outside of football match days and only once outside of the football season (the cricket match referred to above); and the group withering and dying of its own accord, without any fanfare, over a few weeks early in the 1986 WAFL season.<sup>186</sup>

When I stopped going to games, no-one ever contacted me and when I met Pete C. at Fremantle Oval at a game against South Fremantle late in the 1986 home-and-away season we conversed only as friends and neither of us made any mention (if my memory serves me correctly) of the end of the cheer squad. We probably avoid discussing it as it might have been a sad topic. Possibly people could sense my and key others' new-found lack of enthusiasm for the cheer squad and the infectious zeal that had held the group together for two years simply saw its opposite occur: people drifted away because the igniting zeal had left. Only the zeal for West Perth and for the cheer squad had kept the cheer squad together for two full years and through two complete summer off-seasons. I admit that my new pre-occupation during 1986 was my university studies. In hindsight I wish that I had been slightly more proactive in extending the life of the cheer squad without feigning interest or departing from the group's original authenticity.

The West Perth cheer squad (1984-86) also had its equivalent to the ICF's Under 5s (who were in fact teenagers). Our cheer squad had three regularly attending eight-year-olds Michael (whom the group members nicknamed "Half" because he was half the height of the rest of us); Thommo's younger brother "Thommo Junior"; and Tony's younger brother Mario (see Appendix A). A person was always referred to by her / his nickname or, if she / he did not have one, by her / his first name or some variation of it. As with the Lima "barras bravas" of Peruvian soccer<sup>187</sup>, this practice was adopted because it was interesting and because it allowed a person to maintain some measure of anonymity and privacy.<sup>188</sup> Half and Thommo Junior usually sat together just to one side of and / or

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<sup>186</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 266.

<sup>187</sup> Panfichi and Thieroldt, "Barras Bravas".

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

to the rear of the main group, signifying their lack of status and their deference to their seniors.

By its end, the West Perth cheer squad had around fifteen red-and-blue flags of various sizes, shapes, and designs, or around one flag per core member. The cheer squad also had a large 1.2m x 1.2m red-and-blue banner with the words “Cop That” in white lettering, with the word “Cop” on the red horizontal section on top and the word “That” on the blue horizontal section making up the bottom half of the banner. We were very proud of that banner. It helped to give the cheer squad a tough and confrontational but still humorous image. According to my personal notes made during the 1984 season, this banner made its official debut at the Round 14 (7 July) 1984 match at Leederville Oval when West Perth defeated reigning premiers Swan Districts 18.11 (119) to 11.19 (85).<sup>189</sup>

***Western Australia versus Victoria State of Origin game, Subiaco Oval, Tuesday afternoon 17 July 1984***

I also took the “Cop That” banner with some school and neighbourhood mates, including Mike Blewett, Paul Blewett, Chad S., Pete L., Roy G., Paul D., “Gilby”, Wayne D., and Nick (not the Perth Football Club cheer squad leader) to the Western Australia versus Victoria State of Origin game held on Tuesday 17 July 1984. The group stood on the old concrete terraces (now long gone) on the Roberts Road side of the ground in front of the old tin shed just in front of the entrance gates at the city-end. My personal 1984 season notes state that the West Perth cheer squad had been invited to join the combined Perth-Claremont cheer squad, which was representing WA that day in the grandstand, but the West Perth cheer squad declined. Instead I went to the game not with the cheer squad but with a school and neighbourhood-based group of mates. Only Mike B. and I were a part of this group and also part of the West Perth cheer squad. The friends all took the day off school, as did so many people for those Tuesday afternoon state games during the mid-1980s, and we arrived at the game at 9.20am. WA defeated Victoria 21.16 (142) to 12.12 (84) and, according to my 1984 season notes, the highlight of the match was Gary Ablett Senior kicking eight goals for the

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<sup>189</sup> Match scores are taken from Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 334.

losing Victorian team. Our “Cop That” banner was captured that day on camera for an Emu Export beer commercial which ran for many years, and long after the West Perth cheer squad had disbanded. The fact that the banner was red-and-blue but Western Australia’s playing strip was yellow-and-black did not deter the Emu Export marketing people from choosing to use that banner in their long-running commercial. For me the sighting of the banner on the beer commercial was one of the last tangible reminders of the then defunct West Perth cheer squad of 1984-86. I remember reading about the graffiti tag “The Clash”, located on the Harrow Road in West London at the place where it passes under the Westway. Similarly to our banner on the beer commercial, the graffiti remained there, fading slowly, long after that punk group’s vigorous life was over.



## Chapter 3

### Formation and the key characters in the cheer squad

#### *Introduction*

This chapter take readers directly on to the formation of the West Perth cheer squad in the first half of the 1984 WAFL home-and-away season. Following this, this chapter introduces each one of the core cheer squad members individually and discusses the norms of social relationships within the group. A comparison is made at key places with the findings of the worldwide soccer hooligan literature as presented in Chapter 2.

#### ***West Perth versus Subiaco, Leederville Oval, Round 11 (19 June) 1976***

I began attending West Perth games as a seven-year-old in June 1976. My father Laurie first took me to watch the West Perth home game against Subiaco in June 1976 at Leederville Oval. Atkinson's statistical section confirms that the date was 19 June 1976 and the final score was: West Perth 14.17 (110) defeated Subiaco 4.6 (30).<sup>190</sup> My father and I sat directly behind the fence in front of the tin shed in the north-western corner of Leederville Oval, only around 20 or 25 metres from where the cheer squad would congregate for home matches some eight years later. Neither West Perth nor Subiaco was performing brilliantly in 1976 although West Perth had won the 1975 premiership and Subiaco had been premiers in 1973 and finalists in 1974. West Perth was "won 3 lost 7" prior to the match.<sup>191</sup> It was a day of shocking weather, blinding rain, and grey sky. Because of this the official attendance was only 5,346, right at the bottom level of WAFL home-and-away match attendances in the pre-West Coast Eagles era. The crowd was sufficiently small that people could arrive late and sit directly behind the fence. I assume that the covered seats under the tin shed itself had all been taken. Although the ground has been re-developed, and West Perth is no longer based at the ground, the tin shed and the seating beneath it remains the same today as it was then. Because of the rain, my father and I left the ground

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<sup>190</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 329.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

at half-time but the rain had certainly not dampened my enthusiasm. I remember that I loved the atmosphere and sense of occasion of league football. The cheerfulness and brightness of West Perth's red-and-blue colours appealed to me as the playing jerseys must have stood out strongly against the grey sky that day.

I am not completely certain why I chose to support West Perth in 1976. It may have been due to the media coverage and hype surrounding the club as a result of the rags-to-riches fairy tale in 1975 when West Perth, guided by first season Victorian coach and ex-Fitzroy player Graham Campbell, improved from last placing in 1974 to premiers in 1975 without, as Atkinson points out, any new "big name" recruits other than the inspirational coach.<sup>192</sup> I can certainly remember my father and grandfather talking about West Perth's surprise successes during the 1975 season over our regular Sunday night roast dinners.

### ***Family support for the WAFL in the 1950s and 1960s***

My father (Laurie James) had been a casual East Perth supporter from an East Perth family. His uncle-in-law had been a friend of 1955 Perth Football Club premiership player, Hubert "Bert" Wansbrough, who played 127 games for the club between 1952 and 1958.<sup>193</sup> Because of this association, his family would alternate between attending East Perth's home games at Perth Oval and attending Perth's home games at the WACA Ground.<sup>194</sup> Laurie would irritate his own family of "one-eyed East Perth supporters" by simply "appreciating good football" from something similar to "an umpire's perspective".<sup>195</sup>

My maternal grandfather, Herbert Arthur Acott (1906-99), remained a dedicated and devoted Swan Districts supporter right up until his death on 4 July 1999 (aged 93), even though he had moved to Beckenham in the Perth Football Club district as early as 1954. My grandfather used to attend Swans' games weekly, with his best mate Ernie Henderson. They would sit in the R.A. McDonald Stand at Bassendean Oval and in the visiting fans' sections of the grandstands at away games. Their practice

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>193</sup> East, A., Kennedy, P., Lawrence, B. and J. Wicks (2005), *From Redlegs to Demons: a History of the Perth Football Club from 1899* (Perth: Perth Football Club), p. 236.

<sup>194</sup> Personal conversation with Laurie James, Perth, 12 July 2011.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

was to obtain maximum value for money by being at the grounds for the Colts' games which started around 9.15am or 9.30am. They could then watch three games for the price of one. My grandfather would bring along stacks of sandwiches made by my grandmother Margaret (1910-2003) and value for money was probably the main motivation here as well. Mr. Acott continued to attend games up until around the mid-1980s. My mother<sup>196</sup> (Eunice James) can remember that when my grandfather was not attending games he would wash his car on the front lawn of the home at 2 Sexton Road, Inglewood whilst listening to the live Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts of the WAFL games. This was 1951-53 and the famous players of the era were Barry Cable, Marcel "Nugget" Hilsz, Bernie Naylor, and Jack Sheedy.

### ***Primary school daze***

I suppose that I did not want to support Swans (Swan Districts) because I wanted to chart my own course in life. Also West Perth was based reasonably close to my Booragoon home, itself at the eastern end of East Fremantle territory, whereas Swan Districts was based a long way away in the north-eastern outer suburbs close to Guildford and Midland. At my primary school, Mount Pleasant, during my years there 1974-80, around 80% of football followers supported East Fremantle; 10% or 15% supported East Fremantle's arch-rivals South Fremantle; and 5% to 10% supported one of the other six clubs. There were always some Perth supporters as Perth's local zone bordered East Fremantle's at East Fremantle's zone's eastern extremity the Canning River at South Perth. I can remember being one of only two West Perth supporters at my primary school. The only other West Perth supporter in my year was Nigel B. Nigel was not a hardcore supporter by any means but, as was common in the era, he did own the long-sleeved replica playing jersey and he wore it to school. However, as I was well aware, the lack of support for West Perth was due to where I went to school rather than the size of the club's overall supporter base. West Perth still today shares in the second highest WAFL grand final attendance of 52,322 set in 1975<sup>197</sup> and the record of 26,760 for a home-and-away game set at a West Perth

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<sup>196</sup> Personal conversation with Eunice James, Perth, 16 July 2011.

<sup>197</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west\\_perth\\_\(1\).htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west_perth_(1).htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

versus East Perth match at Perth Oval on 31 May 1969.<sup>198</sup> I can say with some assurance that neither of these two figures will ever be beaten now that the WAFL is a second-tier league.

Supporting West Perth built up my resilience and determination during primary school days. I refused to follow trends or to abandon my team. It was always lonely in a district that was hardcore East Fremantle in those days and if you didn't support the club you had to at least make certain that you respected it. However, I found out that Old Easts was fully worthy of my respect due to its marvellously successful history and its very strong contemporary record against West Perth. I played little-league for East Fremantle versus Subiaco at East Fremantle Oval in 1979 and attended coaching clinics at East Fremantle Oval. For my handball skills I once won a Yellow T-shirt with Selsun Blue on the front (as the shampoo brand was the official sponsor) which resulted in endless primary-school teasing!

I was introduced to the harshness of the real-world in mid-season 1979 when that world invaded the safe, community atmosphere of my primary school in the form of coach Percy Johnson being sacked mid-season by the WPFC to make way for the return of the prodigal son Graham Campbell who was unable to achieve much success at the club the second time around. At the age of eight I perceived then that it was harsh and unfair for the club leadership to have blamed Johnson for the team's poor performances and of course the club had forgotten that Johnson had led the club to a finals appearance only the previous season.

### ***West Perth versus East Perth, Leederville Oval, Round 21 (26 August), 1978***

My father; an East Perth supporting school friend Tim B.; and I were there for the final home-and-away game of the 1978 season held at Leederville Oval on 26 August 1978. This match attracted a still record Leederville Oval crowd of 24,567 people.<sup>199</sup> I can remember little of this game except Tim suggesting to me that we stage a mock two-person

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<sup>198</sup> The official attendance is taken from *The Football Budget*, 7 June 1969, p. 30, cited in Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 285.

<sup>199</sup> The official attendance is taken from *The Football Budget*, 2 September 1978, p. 45, cited in *ibid.*, p. 285.

fight on the footpath on the way from the car to the ground (a stupid idea, as I have always valued authenticity); huge crowds on the large scoreboard bank; and the long time it took waiting in line for ice creams and other food. I also remember that it was a fine warm day more consistent with the coming spring season than of the winter just ending.

West Perth was second before the game whilst East Perth was fifth.<sup>200</sup> A surprise win to East Perth that day, possibly on the back of the vocal support of that club's large army of "fair-weather fans" on the huge scoreboard bank, saw East Perth reach the final-four and West Perth relegated to the first semi-final. The final score was: East Perth 11.19 (85) defeated West Perth 11.10 (76).<sup>201</sup> On the same day, Claremont was defeated by the minor premiers Perth, 15.17 (107) to 15.6 (96), which saw Claremont drop out of the final four to be replaced by East Perth.<sup>202</sup> This was somewhat ironic for Perth supporters as East Perth then went on to defeat Perth in the grand final although a young Peter "The Buzz" Bosustow did manage to score a brilliant seven goals for the losers. In the end East Perth was extremely fortunate to defeat Perth by two points on an atrociously wet grand final day at Subiaco Oval. As Perth's history book *From Redlegs to Demons* makes clear, Perth played the 1978 grand final without two of its key players, full-forward Murray Couper and defender John Quartermaine.<sup>203</sup> If these two players had played and / or the day had been fine and / or Barry Cable and Ian Miller had rejoined Perth rather than joined East Perth at the start of the season then surely Perth would have won three premierships in a row to repeat its remarkable feat of the late-1960s.

### ***Fast Times at Applecross High***

By 1982 or 1983, when I was in Year 9 and 10 of government high-school, I gradually stopped going to games with my father who had faithfully taken me to watch West Perth nearly every week of the football season since the Subiaco game in 1976. In Year 10 (1983) I can remember going with classmate and Perth supporter Gaveyn W. to watch Perth versus West Perth at Lathlain Park. We arrived very early at

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<sup>200</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 186.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>202</sup> The match scores are taken from East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 251.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148-50.

the game and bought fish-and-chips and a large bottle of Coke from a fish-and-chip shop just outside the city-end of the ground; we consumed these delights seated behind the fence very close to or perhaps directly behind the city-end goals.

In Year 11, the first year of non-compulsory schooling in Western Australia for students turning 16 during the year, I was in a small-sized form class and struck up a friendship with new student, Mike Blewett (hereafter Mike B.), son of a Westpac bank manager, who had spent his life journeying from one city to another including periods living in Brisbane and New Zealand. Mike B. was and is a very interesting character: temperamental, extremely loyal, honest, courageous, cheerful, risk-loving, and full of important and useful insights on life possibly honed during his travels. As at July 2011 Mike was an area supervisor for a building company in Kalgoorlie, effectively operating as principal contractor for jobs in the town. His younger brother, Paul B., also a good friend, is very different personality-wise. He was and is calm, cautious, analytical, and polite. He completed an accounting degree in Queensland and he started work for the Attorney General's Office in Brisbane in 2010.

I met Mike and Paul for the first time in 25 years in September 2009 for an enjoyable afternoon at an Irish pub at Surfer's Paradise on the Gold Coast. Neither had changed much. Mike spent the lunch ensconced behind his dark sunglasses and he preferred to mostly stand rather than sit. Typical of his generosity he willingly and spontaneously shouted me lunch and several pints of Kilkeny. Paul was wearing a Fremantle Dockers AFL polo shirt, something that is rarely seen in Queensland. A picture in this book shows Mike B. (left) and me at the Exchange Hotel, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia on 14 July 2011.

During 1984, my friendship with Mike B. grew and he was also part of a friendship group centred on Len Shearer Reserve in Booragoon. During 1984 and 1985, I came to belong to three informal friendship groups: a school one, a neighbourhood one, and our West Perth cheer squad. These three groups had no common elements in terms of people involved other than the fact that Mike B. and I were part of all three groups. The neighbourhood group had an average age two or three years younger than the school group although it included two friends one or two years older than me, namely Peter "Pete" Lansbury (a hardcore

East Perth supporter) and Leon D'A. These three friendship groups, my football supporting, my indoor cricket teams, the Trivial Pursuit board-game, and my heavy-metal music were vital parts of my last two years in high-school 1984 and 1985. I can still recall lying on my stomach on my carpeted bedroom floor studying at night in my last term of Year 12 whilst listening to the cassette version of KISS' Australian-only Greatest Hits album *KISS Killers* as well as that band's much-derided but actually quite good "disco" *Dynasty* album of 1979.

*Dynasty* is the last KISS album to feature the great original foursome (Gene, Paul, Ace, and Peter) doing at least one song each on vocals. In their charming boy-next-door New York City proletarian vocal styles, guitarist Ace Frehley sang the autobiographical "Hard Times" while drummer Peter Criss contributed the also autobiographical "Dirty Livin'". KISS was special in that the four masked personas allowed full expression to each of the four personality types behind the masks: Space Ace, Demon, Star Child, and Catman. The songs sung by each individual were also authentic expressions of their personalities. It gave fans the impression that each personality type was worthy of expression and affirmation. KISS was wonderful for the self-confidence of the generation of western (and Japanese and South American) youth that turned ten-years-old sometime in the late-1970s.

My other favourite bands in 1984 and 1985 were AC/DC, Deep Purple, Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Led Zeppelin, Metallica, Rainbow, Saxon, and Scorpions. I loved the "New Wave of British Heavy Metal" (NWOBHM) movement, which I now understand to have been an exciting synthesis of punk and traditional heavy-metal. I can recall listening to a heavy-metal Monday night weekly radio program, probably in 1985 but perhaps 1986, and hearing Metallica's "Fight Fire with Fire", "Hit the Lights", "Motorbreath", "Creeping Death", and "Whiplash", all songs from the band's first two albums *Kill Em All* (1983) and *Ride the Lightning* (1984). I can remember being completely stunned as I had never heard music played that fast. One memory I have is of catching the Number 105 bus after school to go to visit the heavy-metal shop Twilight Records in Perth city-centre and talking to Mitchell D. on the bus journey. He had been a year behind me at my primary-school. I did not know him well at all, but we began talking and I soon discovered that he was a heavy-metal fan who also loved Judas Priest. I also remember

sitting on the Mount Pleasant Primary School Oval on New Year's Eve 1985 with Glen S. aka "Swiftly" (from the new section of Booragoon) and singing "Two Minutes to Midnight" by Iron Maiden whilst drinking beer. Only I was singing as Swiftly was not a heavy-metal fan! He was impressionable and about three years younger than me which explains why he was laughing at the gruesome song lyrics.

Sooner or later, during the first half of 1984, Mike B. declared his hand as a West Perth supporter, and I was and am tremendously happy about this. Without Mike B. it is very doubtful whether the cheer squad could ever have happened or been successful. At that time I did not know whether Mike had simply decided to follow my team or whether he had had an earlier attachment to West Perth. In 2011 Mike told me that he had followed his father to support West Perth when he still lived in Perth city in the period up to his turning five-years-old.<sup>204</sup>

### ***Fat Pam's West Perth cheer squad (disbanded 1983)***

I had become aware, early in the 1984 season, that the earlier famed West Perth Football Club cheer squad, which had congregated behind the northern-end goals at Leederville for many years, had quit completely at the end of 1983. This cheer squad was interesting as, unlike most cheer squads in Australian Rules' history in Victoria, South Australia, and Western Australia, it was dominated by middle-aged females and young children. The legendary leader of this group was a woman known by the woefully politically incorrect moniker of "Fat Pam" (real name: Pam Hynsen).<sup>205</sup> The leading women used to stand upright on the last row of wooden benches behind the northern goals thus placing considerable strain upon the said benches. Their cheer squad was large, committed, and dedicated; it had a huge collection of flags and floggers. This group had operated for a number of years and was well known and respected. I sat near the group at the northern-end of East Fremantle Oval for an East Fremantle versus West Perth match in Round 17 (8 August) 1981.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Personal interview, 14 July 2011.

<sup>205</sup> Fat Pam's cheer squad can be seen on the video-clip of the 7 May 1983 West Perth versus Subiaco game recently posted to YouTube.com. The cheer squad is at far left of screen (behind the Leederville Oval northern end goals). To find this video search YouTube for "West Perth v Subiaco 1983" or simply copy-paste the following link into your browser: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gmZMzTr7CA&feature=related> [accessed 7 August 2011].



East Fremantle Oval, where the aloof hostility and relentless force of the home team and home crowd are matched only by the winds blowing in from the Indian Ocean only a few kilometres away, has always been regarded as a remote and inhospitable place. It was (and is) the most difficult traditional WAFL ground to reach by public transport as it does not have a nearby train service. People were required to either take the low-profile local suburban bus services (numbers 146 and 154 in the 1980s) up Marmion Avenue from Fremantle or the high-frequency flagship 106 route along Canning Highway from either Perth or Fremantle. Taking the 106 meant walking from Canning Highway through vaguely hostile back-streets to the northern corner of the ground where one was met by barb-wire fencing and the rear of a tin shed. A trip there during the 1980s was the local WAFL equivalent of journeying to Millwall Football Club's famous Den ground in south-east London.

Given East Fremantle's great success, as the club with the most premierships won in the WAFL<sup>207</sup> (West Perth is second<sup>208</sup>), a trip to East Fremantle Oval usually meant a resounding defeat at the hands of the home team. East Fremantle had and has an amazing culture of success, whereby anything less than a grand final appearance is viewed as a disappointment and a bottom-four finish is simply beyond the pale, the end of the world, and totally unacceptable. As an example, East Fremantle's history book comments about the 1975 season as follows: "What went wrong?"<sup>209</sup> The author Jack Lee cites the club's magazine *Scoreboard* which stated: "All sorts of excuses will be put forward for our failures in 1975, but the simple truth lies in the simple statement that we just weren't good enough". However, this "failure" was actually a season when the club won 10 games, lost 11, and finished fifth out of eight clubs.<sup>210</sup> Such a result would not have been considered a major failure at some other WAFL clubs including perhaps West Perth which often finished fifth or sixth during its premiership "drought era". Full Points Footy's John Devaney comments indirectly on the East Fremantle winning culture in the following passage:

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<sup>206</sup> Two pictures of Fat Pam's WPFC cheer squad at East Fremantle Oval on 8 August 1981 can be viewed at the following link: <http://waflgoldenera.blogspot.com/2013/12/picture-gallery-fat-pams-west-perth.html> [accessed 5 December 2013].

<sup>207</sup> As at 26 December 2016.

<sup>208</sup> As at 26 December 2016.

<sup>209</sup> Lee, J. (1976), *Old Easts: 1948-1975* (East Fremantle: East Fremantle Football Club), p. 134.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 136.

“As far as on-field performances go, the twenty-first century has, to date, been far from auspicious, with the club failing to qualify for the finals every season between 2003 and 2009, and even succumbing to the rare, if not quite unique, indignity of wooden spoons in 2004 and 2006. Restoring the club to what many would argue is its rightful place at the forefront of the West Australian game is going to be far from easy, but the [East Fremantle] Sharks have faced stiffer challenges over the years, and triumphed, and it would surprise no one to see them challenging seriously for premierships again within the next two or three seasons”.<sup>211</sup>

However, Brian Atkinson correctly points out that:

“[T]o balance East Fremantle’s great successes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps reference should be made to their disastrous start to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the first 11 seasons of the 21<sup>st</sup> century from 2001 to 2011, East Fremantle have only made the finals twice, 4<sup>th</sup> in 2002, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2010. They have finished 9<sup>th</sup> (last) twice, 8<sup>th</sup> once, and 7<sup>th</sup> three times”.<sup>212</sup>

The only other Australian Rules club in Australia with a similar long-term winning culture to East Fremantle is the club John Devaney has supported since childhood, Port Adelaide Magpies in the SANFL. How the East Fremantle winning culture gets retained and transmitted from one generation to the next, especially in these days of the WAFL as a feeder-league with a high regular turnover of players, is itself amazing. Nearly all football followers in Perth, including me, have total respect for East Fremantle, its successes, its culture, its sheer force and (long term, historical) dominance, and its complete professionalism. For Fat Pam’s West Perth cheer squad to take such a large and organized group with flags and floggers to East Fremantle Oval in August 1981 is also worthy of tremendous respect. This is especially so given that this match was between fifth (WPFC) and seventh (EFFC) on the ladder and West Perth was four premiership points outside the top-four before the game. As it was West Perth only one won more game for the season and finished in sixth position with 8 wins and 13 losses (percentage 77.3%).

However, with Fat Pam’s cheer squad disbanded, I sensed a gap and an opportunity. As far as I was aware, in May 1984, Fat Pam’s group continued to make the banners that the players ran through at the start of each game (they may still make these banners today), and our group never attempted to get involved in this activity, mostly out of

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<sup>211</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/east\\_fremantle\\_3.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/east_fremantle_3.htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>212</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 19 November 2011.

respect for Fat Pam's group which had been there long before it. Furthermore, banner making is complicated and tiresome work and I doubt whether our group in 1984 would have had the patience for it. The northern-end at Leederville Oval in 1984 was strangely quiet, empty, and barren, now devoid of West Perth flags and floggers on home match days. I felt that the team would be inspired by a vocal group of home supporters, with a colourful red-and-blue visual presence, at the northern-end of Leederville. A Melbourne Knights' soccer supporter puts forward her view (below) that her team has been inspired and encouraged on occasion by the vociferous, noisy, and colourful support of the club's hooligan firm Melbourne Croatia Fans or MCF:

"From what I can gather, the MCF is largely made up of young men who are passionate about their club, its heritage and its importance to the Croatian community. They are loyally devoted to their team and will often travel great distances in order to show their support. The songs, chants and banners have (according to the players) been known to lift our team in crucial moments during the match".<sup>213</sup>

My personal notes from the 1984 season state that I attended two of the first five West Perth games before the formation of the cheer squad. I was inspired to set up a new unofficial cheer squad to replace Fat Pam's group behind the northern-end goals at home matches and to travel to select away games. I expected that the demographics of my new group would be totally different to Fat Pam's group but I hoped that our members would show the same loyalty, dedication, commitment, and spirit. The new cheer squad would have a lot to live up to.

### ***West Perth versus South Fremantle, Leederville Oval, Round 6 (5 May), 1984***

Being somewhat naive about the ways of the world, and then aged 15, I placed an advertisement in the "Public Notices" in the "Classifieds" section of our daily newspaper, *The West Australian*, to appear one Friday in May 1984, the second full month of the new football season. The advertisement asked any individuals interested in forming a new West Perth cheer squad to meet at the next home game and to look for the flags. Of course teenaged football supporter are unlikely to be

<sup>213</sup> Melbourne Knights' supporter, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 23 August 2010.

consulting such an obscure section of the newspaper's Classifieds every day of the week just waiting for such an ad to appear!

I recently located this ad in the microfilm copies of *The West Australian* held at the Batty Library in Perth. The ad appeared on p. 41 of *The West Australian* on Friday 4 May 1984, directly below the opening ad for the "Public Notices" section "Acrylic nails beautiful hands for just \$25". My ad read as follows: "ANYONE interested in being part of a West Perth football cheer squad pref age 11-17 meet at the ground this Saturday. Look for the flags". There are several coded messages for insiders here with the name of the football ground for the next day's game not being mentioned on the assumption that fans dedicated enough to join a new cheer squad would know where the game was to be played. It puts the onus on the reader to "look for the flags", rather than specifying an exact location, perhaps because Mike B. and I had not decided beforehand where to congregate. The ad assumes that the reference to "West Perth" would be enough to communicate to insiders that it is the WAFL club being referred to and not a more minor club in another football code such as the then West Perth Macedonia (now Stirling Lions) Soccer Club. The preferred ages listed (11-17) are typical of cheer squads for the era, based on the Victorian and South Australian models, and most of the group's members did turn out to be within this age range. Including the ad in the Friday rather than the Saturday edition was perhaps my attempt to communicate to readers that this cheer squad was to be treated as serious, "week-day" business although it would meet on Saturdays. I am surprised that I did not put the ad in the Business section!

As mentioned, Mike B. was willing and interested in the cheer squad idea so, together on the Saturday 5 May 1984, the day subsequent to the Friday of the advertisement, Mike B. and I took the Number 105 bus from Booragoon into Perth city-centre, walked two blocks from St George's Terrace to Barrack Street (just north of Murray Street), and then caught the 1.15pm Number 15 bus to Glendalough. Mike B. and I then alighted near the ground along the Oxford Street cappuccino strip, not far from the corner with Vincent Street. I am fairly sure that Mike B. and I already had two large red-and-blue homemade flags on this day. The ad did clearly say "look for the flags". The group would add significantly to these two flags over the next two years ending up with

around 15 flags at one point or approximately one flag per core member. On this day Mike B. and I both wore long-sleeved West Perth replica playing jerseys. Although these were not the height of fashion even in the mid-1980s Mike B. and I were both very proud to show off our club loyalties.

Contemporaneous newspaper reportage confirms that this match was the thrilling home draw against South Fremantle on 5 May 1984 described by Atkinson in his book *It's a Grand Old Flag*.<sup>214</sup> Atkinson recounts that the slender Aboriginal forward flanker Ron Davis kicked two goals out of three for West Perth in the last five minutes to draw the game with only fifteen seconds remaining.<sup>215</sup> The final score was: West Perth 15.15 (105) drew South Fremantle 16.9 (105)<sup>216</sup> and the official attendance was 7,790.<sup>217</sup> I certainly do remember a joyous mood that day commensurate with an exciting come-from-behind draw. It was the perfect on-field start to begin the cheer squad era! I also remember that the weather was fine but cold. It was the first drawn match in the WAFL since 20 April 1974. It is remarkable that the games I now classify as the first and last games for the cheer squad were both draws, versus South Fremantle at Leederville Oval on 5 May 1984 and versus Perth at Lathlain Park on 29 March 1986.

Mike B. and I must have exerted an aura of charm and authenticity on this day as a number of people came up to us, introduced themselves, and stayed with us for the rest of the afternoon including Courtney; Rohan H.; and Mark T. (hereafter "Thommo"). Some of these people, including the three names mentioned, would become core members of the cheer squad and stick with the group for the next two years. I think that people were aware that Fat Pam's long-serving cheer squad had withdrawn from active service at the northern-end goals at the end of 1983, and some people may have been waiting or hoping for a new group to form (whether connected to the previous group or otherwise).

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<sup>214</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 201.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201. Ron (Ronald Brian) Davis (DOB 11/8/1963) played 13 senior games for West Perth in 1984-85 and kicked 22 goals. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>216</sup> The match scores are taken from *Ibid.*, p. 334; *The West Australian*, Monday, 7 May, 1984, p. 81.

<sup>217</sup> The official attendance is taken from the WAFL Online website.

***The sub-gangs (refer to Appendix A for a full listing)***

If my memory serves me correctly, Courtney and his friend Rohan H. both joined the group on the first day. Both were to form part of the core for the next two years with Courtney arguably filling a role as deputy leader, along a second rank, with his suburban junior football friend Thommo who most probably joined the group on that first day as well. In our group there were tiny sub-gangs following the same pattern, but with smaller numbers, as Sheffield United's Blades<sup>218</sup>; Portsmouth's 6.57 Crew; or the Peruvian *barras bravas* of Lima.<sup>219</sup> The sub-gangs operated along the lines of friendships formed prior to joining the group and suburbs of residence. The sub-groups had two or three people in each, and each sub-group had a particular relationship with the joint-founders, Mike B. and me, and with the group as a whole. Appendix A lists the sub-gangs and the members belonging to each. Courtney and Rohan (the "Carine group") was a sub-gang, as was the "Balga group" of Peter "P.A." Brennan (family name changed) and Dave S. (name changed). Thommo and Robbie, who joined the cheer squad only in 1985, were viewed as "floaters" or non-aligned.

Because Thommo and Robbie knew each other and Thommo knew Courtney prior to anyone joining the group they were key links between the sub-gangs. People from the same district were viewed as sub-gangs since they would habitually take the same buses or trains to and from the games together. It was possible to see a very shaky organizational chart emerge of the core since the two blonds, Courtney and Mike B., had always had a strong relationship, while I related reasonably well with the red-haired Thommo. The cheer squad also included the three C. brothers (aged 14, 15, and 16 at the group's inception) who had spent considerable time in reform homes and were commonly perceived as having no fixed abode.

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<sup>218</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, pp. 323-32.

<sup>219</sup> Panfichi and Thieroldt, "Barras Bravas".

### ***The nature of fan support within the cheer squad***

As with the Sheffield United Blades members, studied by Armstrong, the core cheer squad members were all dedicated West Perth supporters and the core members regarded the group as important in their lives and in their match-day experiences of fandom.<sup>220</sup> The core group members were all “traditional” and “hot” supporters based on Richard Giulianotti’s theory of the four types of soccer spectators in the global game, namely “supporters” (traditional, hot); “followers” (traditional, cool); “fans” (consumerist, hot); and “*flâneurs*” (consumerist, cool).<sup>221</sup> Although Mike B., Courtney, and Rohan engaged in conspicuous consumption in the area of fashionable dressing this consumption did not extend to their football support which remained “traditional” and “hot”. Group members who only occasionally attended games, such as Robert C., might be classified as followers with “traditional” yet “cool” forms of club identification.

### ***The nature of group relationships***

The group members took advantage of people’s natural good connections and natural feelings for one another; the group founders worked on strategically building and making full use of these relationships. On the other hand, if two people did not relate very well or easily, this weak link in the chain was bypassed with these two people largely avoiding each other but each one building strong relationships with other core members. Prickly relationships were subtly monitored by the core members to make sure that they were kept manageable and within reasonable limits. It was understood that the “general will” of the cheer squad, to use the term of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, was more important than anyone’s private agenda.<sup>222</sup> The cheer squad members understood, even from day one, that if key relationships were not kept harmonious then people would not be attracted to the group. Group members realized that an

<sup>220</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 266.

<sup>221</sup> Giulianotti, R. (2002), “Supporters, Followers, Fans and *Flâneurs*: a Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in World Football”, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 25-46, cited in Giulianotti, R. and R. Robertson (2009), *Globalization & Football*, paperback edition (London: SAGE Publications), pp. 142-3.

<sup>222</sup> Rousseau, J.-J. (1968), *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin Classics).

atmosphere of warm camaraderie and good humour, as well as a somewhat “macho” atmosphere, were necessary for the cheer squad to thrive and grow. This atmosphere was both authentic and had to be consciously worked at each match-day.

Although the group, sadly, did not grow much over its two-year life, the core 15 members were loyal and dedicated, and, on good days of fine weather and interesting opponents, large numbers of hangers-on and drifters of various ages would join us. This was especially so at away games where West Perth fans had no habitual place(s) to sit and were wary of the home team supporters. This is why club colours were important so, other than Mike B., Courtney, and Rohan, group members did not follow the designer dressing style of the 1980s English soccer “casuals”. West Perth fans, especially at away games, would tend to look for and congregate with groups of people wearing the club colours and looking like an authentic and believable gang of supporters. During the 2013 WAFL season, I noticed travelling Perth Football Club supporters congregating together in certain corners of the ground at both Bassendean and Claremont Ovals. Our West Perth cheer squad was also very fortunate that there were many fine-weather Saturday afternoons in 1984 which kept group attendances and people’s enthusiasm for the group high.

My personal 1984 season notes, compiled during 1984, state that Mike B. and I did not attend the next three games, Swan Districts versus West Perth at Bassendean Oval (12 May); West Perth versus Perth at Subiaco Oval (19 May); and Subiaco versus West Perth at Subiaco Oval (26 May), because I was on holiday in Adelaide and Melbourne (see Chapter 2). I attended the next game, West Perth versus East Perth at Leederville Oval (Monday 4 June) with school-friend Roy George and the cheer squad may or may not have been in action that day. It took some weeks for the cheer squad to gel and solidify, and to grow to the structure and size that it had during the 1985 season.



***Courtney, 14-years-old, from Carine, friend of Rohan and Thommo***

Fourteen-year-old Courtney was a designer dresser in the manner of the English “soccer casuals” of the 1980s. He was very interested in fashion. I think that he also had a long-sleeved West Perth replica jersey but, other than that somewhat unfashionable item of clothing, he always wore colourful vee-neck woollen jumpers (pullovers); bulky cargo shorts (even on the coldest days); and navy deck shoes without socks. Courtney came from a middle-class or upper middle-class family suburb in WPFC’s geographic district. It was most likely Carine which is today part of Subiaco’s recruiting zone. In my memory I had thought that Courtney’s family name was Walsh, but this seems unlikely given that “Courtney Walsh” was the name of a famous West Indian cricketer of the era. Courtney Jones is another possibility.

***Rohan H., 14-years, from Carine, Courtney’s friend***

Brown-haired, 14-year-old Rohan H. was a slender, quiet lad who stuck close to Courtney. They were school-friends in the northern suburbs and both were committed to the group from the first match. I can say that I never got to know Rohan well. His manner was aloof and unapproachable, but this was not due to arrogance; more likely it was because of shyness and caution. Rohan was very much an introvert but he showed his commitment to the group by his regular attendance for two years. Courtney and Rohan were together the “middle-class” and the relatively more self-controlled sub-gang within the core but they also enjoyed the more boisterous and insulting chants and songs. If you could say that there was a second layer of leadership, “below” Mike B. and me, it would have been the trio of 14-year-olds Courtney, Rohan, and Thommo. Nobody could dare to think that there might have been a third layer but the prepubescent sub-gang (“Half”, “Thommo Junior”, and Mario) clearly ranked lower in sub-cultural prestige than all of the others in the core, but still higher than people in the periphery whom group members did not know personally. Of course the sub-gangs of Mike C.-Pete C. and P.A.-Dave S. might have viewed themselves as second- or third-tier leaders, and such claims would have been more than plausible.

Brothers Mike C. (16-years-old) and Pete C. (14-years-old) were also key members of the core group for part of 1984 and all of 1985. These brothers were different in temperament in the same manner as the B. boys were, with the elder one being volatile and the younger one being calm and collected. They had been in and out of reform homes all their lives. If Courtney and Rohan was the “middle-class” sub-gang then the C. brothers were the “lumpenproletariat” or “dangerous classes” (to use the two terms of Karl Marx). Academic hooligan literature from England and many European countries suggests that hooligans are mostly working-class although the percentage in professional and managerial occupations was stable and increasing. The working-class dominance is not apparently the case in Italy or in some South American locations where it is more middle-class based.

### ***The cheer squad as fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribe”***

Generally speaking the West Perth cheer squad conforms to the idea of fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” where affiliations are very loose and people can easily adjust their degrees of commitment to a group and / or leave the group when their personal priorities and interests change.<sup>223</sup> Hughson indicates that few people remained integral parts of hooligan firms in the UK beyond their early-20s although Cass Pennant and Rob Silvester suggest that Millwall’s Bushwackers firm was probably an exception.<sup>224</sup> Armstrong writes that by the 1980s the “vast majority of Blades were aged between seventeen and twenty-eight”.<sup>225</sup> As with the UK soccer hooligans, people recognized that joining the West Perth cheer squad was totally voluntary, without any of the legal and economic ties that define workplace, marketplace, and institutional relationships. As such, the group was always careful not to “invade” another member’s outside life, i.e. his life outside the group at home, school or work. Group members rarely contacted each other by telephone or met during the week outside of Saturday match-days. Group members only met five times outside of match days during the whole 1984-86 period and only

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<sup>223</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 306; Hughson, ‘Football, Folk Dancing and Fascism’, pp. 167-86; Hughson, ‘The Bad Blue Boys’, pp. 239-59; Hughson, ‘A Tale of Two Tribes’, pp. 10-30; Hughson, ‘The Boys are Back in Town’, pp. 8-23; Hughson, ‘Australian Soccer’s “Ethnic Tribes”’, pp. 37-48.

<sup>224</sup> Pennant, *Congratulations*; Pennant, Cass; Pennant and Silvester, *Rolling with the 6.57 Crew*.

<sup>225</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 267.

once outside of football season (when Pete C., Mike C., and I attended a season-opening one-day domestic cricket match at the WACA Ground).

***“Group-for-itself” versus “group-in-itself”***

Regardless of his background, everyone in the cheer squad was treated and valued equally, and I believe that each group member experienced and enjoyed the camaraderie of the group. Without these positive factors each individual in the core would not have stuck with the cheer squad for two years when there were no legal, economic or moral ties to bind anyone to the group.<sup>226</sup> People had to enjoy sitting with the group or the group would lose them. Everyone made the effort to create a warm and cheerful atmosphere; to welcome newcomers; and to encourage each other amidst the usual teasing and insults that you might expect in the male group situation. Everyone certainly was a dedicated West Perth supporter and the core members regarded the group as important in their lives and vital in their match-day experiences of fandom. No-one in the group was like those English soccer hooligans whom, allegedly, are not interested in the actual game or their club. The founders felt responsible for providing the group with a minimum of organization; making sure that teasing and insults were in a good spirit (especially when young members such as Half were on the receiving end); and resolving disagreements. It would be impossible to argue that continuing membership in the group was something not freely chosen by the core members for that two-year period.

Pave Jusup (aged 22 at date of interview), a leader and founding member of the MCF firm at Melbourne Knights, states consistent with the “loose ties” theory that the only things MCF members have in common are: (a) attending the games; (b) drugs and alcohol; and (c) Croatian heritage.<sup>227</sup> However, he also suggests that the MCF is more organized than the firm at fellow Melbourne-based Croatian club, St Alban’s (at date of interview it was a Victorian Premier League (VPL) club), in that the MCF is organized sufficiently to arrange bus trips interstate. In Pave’s words: “[t]he supporters of St Alban’s are not like us but they [also] do silly stuff. They are not organized like us. We are a

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Group interview, 11 January 2011.

proper group. They are just people that turn up at games and sing and drink a lot. We organize time at the pub and away trips". Our West Perth cheer squad lacked the ethnic heritage in common that the MCF has and drugs and alcohol were not part of the cheer squad's routine. However, at least after the first four or five weeks, the cheer squad was definitely, in Pave's words, a "proper group" just like the MCF is today. The group was a "group-for-itself" not just a "group-in-itself". The theoretical distinction between "group-for-itself" and "group-in-itself" appears to characterize the difference between the MCF and the St Alban's support.

***Mark T. aka "Thommo", 14-years-old, "floater" / non-aligned, Courtney's junior football friend***

The next character I will introduce to readers is the senior "Thommo", always known to the group members by the nickname of "Thommo" which he brought into the group from his home-suburb and high-school. Group members did coin some nicknames within the group. "Half" was the best and most famous of these. However, most of the nicknames people naturally brought into the group from outside and it were more authentic and simpler to use these pre-existing names than to invent new ones. Those nicknames brought in from outside the group and from outside West Perth football included "P.A." and "Thommo".

The senior Thommo's character was complex. He was, like many of the others, a working-class rebel and a very loyal and tough person. He could chat calmly and intelligently with people, but, if he felt that he was being disrespected, then he would change in an instant, and give that person a swift rebuke and stinging defence of himself and of his arguments. In that way people learned to respect him and be slightly wary of his reactions although you could also praise and respect him for his mild-mannered nature, self-control, and good humour. He was great for joking and laughter and he also enjoyed getting analytical at times about West Perth's players and performances.

Another point to note is that Thommo knew Courtney through junior football although they were not from the same high-school. Thommo then became an important natural link between the various sub-gangs in the group. His background, dressing, and style were more proletarian

than those of the “Carine group”, Courtney and Rohan. However, the link between Thommo and “the Carine group” was important and a part of the glue that reinforced trust and goodwill especially in those early weeks in 1984 when group members did not know each other well.

Cheer squad members all used to stay behind after games until well after darkness on the playing surface of Leederville Oval and the away venues to kick footballs amongst themselves. Thommo, in these encounters, was a fast, courageous, and skilful footballer. He would contest marks against the immobile rock that was P.A. who was six-feet-two and a veritable 18-year-old man mountain. P.A. would stand in one place to mark and kick whilst Thommo and the others would use their speed and skill to steal the marks from P.A., either in front or to the side of him, or else they would pick up the loose balls that P.A. spilled.

I can remember Thommo’s habitual long-sleeved checked flannel shirts, later made famous in the grunge music era of the early-1990s, and how he would always have a cigarette packet in his chest pocket which would often fall to the ground whilst he was running at or with the football. He would then quickly run back to recover his cigarette packet from the ground in order to beat any potential “thieves”. Group members stuck with their own group in these football games, and would never formally join in with strangers. This is perhaps further evidence for the proposition that the West Perth cheer squad was a “group-for-itself”. It was an important relaxation and bonding time for the group members. It is unfortunate that AFL games do not allow the after-match kick on the field of play and this is another reason why attending WAFL or SANFL or the current VFL (formerly Victorian Football Association or VFA) games, at that second-tier level, can be a much more rewarding and enjoyable experience than attending AFL matches. Hunt and Bond write that: “Progress [in the AFL] has come at a cost, however, and one of the sacrifices the game has made is the kick-to-kick sessions on the ground after a match that we grew up with. And that’s a shame”.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Hunt, R. and G. Bond (2005), *The Fat Lady sings: 40 Years in Footy* (Southbank: News Custom Publishing), p. 98.

***“P.A.” and Dave S., 18-years-old and 16-years-old, the Balga sub-gang***

My personal 1984 WAFL season notes, compiled during the 1984 season, state that Peter “P.A.” Brennan (family name changed) (hereafter “P.A.”) and Dave S. (name changed) first joined the group for the Round 12 (23 June) 1984 match when West Perth defeated Claremont 21.10 (136) to 9.14 (68) at Subiaco Oval.<sup>229</sup> Although at that time P.A. and D.S. were regarded by group members as being the “Balga group” D.S. was actually from Tuart Hill as he confirmed via a since self-deleted comment he posted on the *WAFL Golden Era* website (waflgoldenera.blogspot.com) on 14 June 2013. P.A. and D.S. together made an interesting spectacle, and I do remember that it was with great interest and some anxiety that group members watched the pair walk towards them on the first day. P.A. was six-feet-two, stocky, and built like a country league football ruckman (or like ruckman Ron Boucher of the Swan Districts Football Club) whereas D.S. was much shorter and quite slim. Together they could look quite comical.

Like Thommo, P.A. would aggressively defend himself (verbally) against anyone showing him disrespect. He would not use violence but instead he used scattered insults, teasing, and self-defensive analysis. He enjoyed the more extreme and crude banter and especially the cheer squad’s insulting chants directed at the umpires and opposition players. He came from the working-class, government-housing estate of Balga, like the young West Perth player of that era and future North Melbourne AFL champion and coach, Dean Laidley (who played 70 games for West Perth, 1984-89 and 1991-92<sup>230</sup>).

P.A. was totally loyal to the cheer squad and group members did their best to understand his strengths and weaknesses and to “accommodate” him. At times P.A. could surprise by his deeply analytical and calm discussions of football tactics and strategies; usually he would direct these statements to me as he presumed that I was either the group leader and / or the resident intellectual. At other times P.A. could be very childish. Mike B. was often annoyed by this childishness and he would threaten to leave the cheer squad and join the Grandstand

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<sup>229</sup> Match scores are taken from Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 334.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

Falcons but this never happened. Therefore, P.A. had his childish side and he also had his analytical side and people accepted these two sides of him.

P.A. had a subconscious tactic where, if he was being teased excessively, he would sometimes respond by quasi-analytical comments addressed to me (if I was not the main person doing the teasing). He would also get red in the face and break out in a silly grin when being teased which made him very vulnerable on the teasing front. He would bend down lower in his seated position as if to make a smaller target which was ridiculous given his height and bulky frame. P.A. was the oldest member of the group. I think his friend D.S. was two years younger than him or 16-years-old when the cheer squad first formed in 1984.

D.S., the cheer squad's only Asian member, was an ethnic Chinese who also, from day one, wore the Bogan "uniform" of long-sleeved West Perth replica playing jersey and plain blue or black jeans (the most popular dressing style in the cheer squad). He was first seen with P.A. before they joined the group, and he also was associated with the "Balga group" although he came from Tuart Hill. He was also a very strange character and he had a love-hate relationship with P.A. that involved frequent insults directed at P.A.'s alleged stupidity and gullibility. It could be said that D.S. had a love-hate relationship with every group member. He spoke very good English, with a somewhat upper-class accent. D.S. was sarcastic and prickly, and he was extremely quick to defend himself. Group members felt that he must have encountered some severe racism which had led to the formation of his present personality. D.S. was on occasion verbally aggressive, sarcastic, insulting, and not highly liked. However, he was also loyal to the cheer squad for two years and I think that the people in the core group respected that fact. D.S. also enjoyed the intellectual discussions group members had about football tactics although he did not usually respect P.A.'s contributions. Early on he explained to the group that Peter B.'s nickname of "P.A." could be understood to mean either "Public Address System", because his voice was deep and loud, or be his initials as in "Peter Something". This second explanation made little sense as P.A.'s real name was allegedly Peter Brennan (family name changed) and his initials were P.B. However, group members accepted the explanations at face value

because the nickname was clearly authentic and stranger things have happened out on the housing estates.

D.S. and P.A. often sat together and P.A. was usually in the group members' front row of seats directly behind the fence. I remember that he was often in the group's front row of people and so he (P.A.) would sometimes literally have to turn around to give me his analytical insights into the game in progress. An interesting coincidence was that West Perth's then league-team captain and one of the club's greatest ever players was Les Fong, a Chinese-Australian who was nicknamed "Chopsticks", "Choppy" or "Chopper", and then the cheer squad had its own Chinese member in D.S. Perhaps Les Fong's presence at West Perth made it easier for the cheer squad members to accept D.S. Their actual names in fact rhymed and had only two different letters out of seven. Group members regarded it as interesting, symmetrical, and appropriate that the cheer squad had its own Chinese member. It meant that the West Perth senior team squad had its mirror image, in terms of ethnic mix, on the other side of the playing fence.

I cannot remember D.S. facing any racism that was hostile from any of the cheer squad's core members but of course he may have experienced some teasing and put-downs. As with Thommo, D.S. had a very well-developed self-defence mechanism so people knew where they could stray verbally and where they could not. D.S. must have enjoyed cheer squad membership or he would not have stayed with us for two years. He was also a very faithful member even though he could never have been described as warm or even as friendly much of the time. He could also vary significantly in temperament and mood from week to week so on some weeks he might greet you warmly while on other weeks he might ignore a greeting. People had to work hard to earn his respect although he probably respected all or most of the cheer squad members, to some certain basic extent, if his continued attendance at games with the cheer squad was any indication. Of course people learned to expect D.S.'s mood changes and to live with them. I seem to recall that D.S. got on better with Courtney than with either Mike C. or Pete C. who were perhaps too "lumpenproletarian" for him.

One of D.S.'s strong points, other than his loyalty to the cheer squad, was that he would often laugh at the humour being shared around, and his face would sometimes light up in a wide and magnificent



smile. If D.S. wanted to discuss something serious, he would come up very close to you, remove his black sunglasses, and quietly and carefully make his points. The removal of the “sunnies” was the sign of his respect and the seriousness of his point. D.S. loved the actual sport of Australian Rules more than most fans; watched each game pan out with eagle eyes (or perhaps we should say “with falcon eyes”); and he would rebuke people who made what he considered to be unnecessary noise. Sometimes the joking would set off among five or six group members. P.A. would double up, bend down lower, and emit loud laughs. D.S. would rarely laugh but he would have this wide smile while his eyes remained intently focused on the game! These were some of the better moments of the cheer squad. Despite this, I tended to keep D.S. at a distance, as did most people. However, D.S. clearly had a strong bond with P.A. that *appeared to* pre-date the day on which P.A. and D.S. joined the cheer squad. The way the cheer squad worked was to honour and respect, and to some extent even to trust, these pre-existing bonds that people brought into the group from their home-suburbs and high-schools.

***Mike C. and Pete C., 16-years-old and 14-years-old, no fixed abode***

As mentioned, Mike C. and Pete C. were an integral part of the cheer squad from very early on. Cheer squad members knew that both had a background of reform homes, but no-one ever thought that either would steal anything from the group members or anything similar. Mike C. could find it hard to control his emotions, whether anger or excitement, so group members assumed his troubles with the police had related in some way to this. No-one ever asked him what his troubles had been. Pete C. once said that Mike “hated pigs” and no-one found this especially hard to believe. Cheer squad members adopted the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

Mike C. was a scary sight to people that didn’t know him and even to some of those who did. When he got excited by the football he would walk straight up to someone in the group, stand right in front of him, and totally invade his personal space, without seemingly being aware of it. He would also do this when greeting someone for the first time each match-day. His big green eyes got fiery when excited and, in his muscle

tee-shirts of the 1980s and his long, thick, black, wavy hair, he cut a scary figure, and he was a vital part of the group's tough-guy image. Under his replica West Perth playing jersey, Mike C. would wear short-sleeved muscle tee-shirts, in bright colours, made famous by Australian rock stars of the era such as Cold Chisel's Jimmy Barnes and AC/DC's Bon Scott and Malcolm Young (6 January 1953 – 18 November 2017). Mike C. was at his most boisterous on West Perth's good days when he would loudly and gleefully start and continue chants and songs. Mike C. was completely unafraid of opposing supporters, enjoyed loudly and conspicuously "invading" opposing team's grounds, especially at Bassendean Oval, and he could become oblivious to place and context. Only the eight-year-old "Half" was as openly boisterous as Mike C. When excited, both individuals would cover large amounts of space in and near the cheer squad's chosen area, standing on and leaping over seats and waving flags and chanting.

Pete C. was a complete contrast to Mike C.: short, quiet, softly spoken, polite, thoughtful, gentle, analytical yet equally loyal – to his brother, to the cheer squad, and to the WPFC. He was one of the people whom I most enjoyed talking to. As with his brother Mike C., his standard match-day Bogan attire was long-sleeved West Perth replica jersey, tight blue or black jeans, and cheap sneakers. Both the brothers were fiercely loyal to each other and, of course, this fact and the underlying attitude behind it were very helpful to the cheer squad. Group members all valued the brothers' loyalty, warmth, and dedication to each other, to the group, and to West Perth. The C. brothers, along with Thommo and Robbie, gave the group much of its "illusion of violence" and the hooligan look and attitude. Group members knew that the C. brothers had no fixed abode and lived hand-to-mouth, and the group members thrived on this knowledge; it gave the cheer squad a working-class tough-guy persona that it might otherwise have lacked.

***Michael aka “Half”, 8-years-old, from Bayswater***

I now move on to mention the group's most important and famous younger member, Michael, or “Half” as the group members christened him because he was one-half the height of the other people in the group. Half was a sandy-haired eight-year-old whose parents were financial members of the West Perth Football Club. They sat in the grandstand at home games and attended all away games. They allowed Half to set his own agenda, go his own way, and make his own friends during the games as long as he did not leave the enclosed confines of the grounds. That was an era where people generally let their children roam free and people were less conscious of the threat of paedophiles. His parents were never seen by the group members but I suppose that group members viewed them as spectral support from the more respectable section of the West Perth supporter base. They attended all games home and away. Certainly they gave the group a certain amount of trust and group members did feel some obligation and responsibility regarding Half's welfare. Half was a very passionate West Perth supporter although I believe he lived in the East Perth FC geographic district in either Bayswater or Maylands.

Half joined the cheer squad for every home and away game for two years and he always joined group members on the playing surface after games for the informal kick-to-kick sessions among the group members. He was always regarded as an important part of the cheer squad and his nickname was a sign of affection. He was a carefree extrovert who liked chatting and laughing and would get very excited during significant moments of play when West Perth was doing well. At such times he would run around and climb up on to empty seats, waving his flag furiously. He would enjoy the insulting cheer squad chants and enjoy negative discussions about other teams and verbally jousting with rival fans of his own age if any of them came too close. Like every group member, he genuinely loved and admired the playing group, the team, and the club but in the innocent way you would expect of an eight-year-old. When he urinated on the oval during kick-to-kick sessions he would receive a rebuke from other members who would quickly look away!

In 2011 Mike B. reminded me of an incident involving Half which had not risen to the top of my memory and so had not made the first

draft of this book.<sup>231</sup> At one particular game at Leederville Oval, one of the teams was on a scoring spree and the football would repeatedly sail over the wire fencing which was and is only around eight metres behind the boundary fence at the Technical School (northern) end of the ground. Half knew the quickest way from the oval into the Technical School grounds and, due to his knowledge of this route combined with his pace and alertness, he was always first through to the Technical School to recover the footballs. As Mike recounts the story<sup>232</sup>, Half used to put the footballs under his jumper, re-enter the ground, and then give the footballs to his mother seated in the grandstand who was complicit in the thefts. One can only imagine the height and width of his perpetual cheeky grins on this particular afternoon! Mike says this occurred at many of the games but at one game in particular there was a scoring spree at the Technical School end and Half stole many footballs on this day alone. In the redevelopment of the ground over the past ten years the seats behind the goals and on the scoreboard wing have all gone but those in front of the tin shed, in the north-western corner of the ground, still remain today as they were in 1984.

Once I recall telephoning Half's house to discuss with him tickets relating to either the Sandover Medal Night, at the now demolished Perth Entertainment Centre in 1984, or to the first semi-final of 1985. I recall Half's father answering the phone and being very wary initially. However, when he heard that I was from "West Perth cheer squad", he totally relaxed, and he handed the phone over to Half. I arranged with Half for the buying of his ticket in conjunction with his father. Half could be quite mature in discussing things such as buying tickets to events. He certainly did not want to miss out on anything. Overall Half was an extremely interesting character and almost the cute and cheeky mascot of the cheer squad.

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<sup>231</sup> Personal interview, 14 July 2011.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

### ***The cheer squad's flags and floggers***

After the cheer squad membership had settled, Mike B. and I took the step as group founders to allow people to take home flags and banners after games on the proviso that the person bring the flag or banner to the game on the following Saturday. So although each flag still belonged to me, group members regarded the flags as “property in common”. People felt pride in taking these flags back home and, in the case of most of the group members, back in the train and through the city-centre. Half and 13-year-old Tony travelled to the games in cars with their parents but I believe that both of them felt honoured to take flags back home and to be entrusted with this responsibility. I am not aware of any of the flags having gone missing during the two years. When the group effectively disbanded, early in the 1986 home-and-away season, I made no effort to claim back any of the flags and, to this day, I do not know where they are. I have never seen them resurface at games.

Sometime during the 1984 season, one group member made the surprising discovery that the red and blue floggers belonging to Fat Pam's cheer squad were still locked up in the storerooms of the club at Leederville Oval. “Floggers” are pieces, around 1.5 metres long; of coloured paper mache cut into strips around one inch or 2.5 cm wide and attached to a pole to be placed over the fence on match days and heaved up and down at significant moments. They look best in conjunction with flags which are waved higher up and behind them. Critchley<sup>233</sup> cites Richmond's cheer squad leader, Gerard Egan, who says that Richmond switched over from paper mache to plastic floggers around 1985 or 1986 because the plastic floggers were not harmed in the rain. Critchley<sup>234</sup> even offers a formal definition of “floggers”; clearly the name had been transplanted from Victorian cheer squad culture to Western Australia by 1984. Our group had only the old-style paper mache floggers but they were spared significant damage because, as mentioned, there were many fine-weather Saturdays during the 1984 season.

The cheer squad members took all of the Fat Pam group's floggers out, added them to the group's inventory of common property, and used

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<sup>233</sup> Critchley, *Our Footy*, p. 21.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

them at each home game. The group members decided to deposit them in the club storerooms at Leederville Oval after home matches and use them only at the home games. The floggers were too cumbersome and bulky to take to away games and not quite “macho” enough to be seen with on trains or in the city-centre. I do not think that any floggers were lost or damaged during those two years as their numbers always seemed to be about the same week after week.

Group members routinely broke what is now an AFL rule for cheer squads and that was already a WAFL rule in 1984-85 but not regularly enforced. Group members positioned the floggers over, rather than behind, the boundary fence while not in use thus covering up the precious advertising signs. When the rule about these signs not being covered is enforced this represents movement to a higher stage of capitalism within the football industry since it allows businesses to place their interests above those of supporters even *in absentia*; thus the businesses can rule over supporters on match days *even from beyond the physical confines of the stadium*.<sup>235</sup> Group members would argue with and insult any WAFL official who suggested that the group members should position the floggers inside the fence when not in use. To follow this regulation would have been silly as, firstly, the visual look from far off was important and, secondly, the floggers could be torn apart by people's shoes if positioned behind the fence. In the end no league or club official ever seriously challenged the group's collective moral authority with regards to the floggers' issue. Those were more innocent times when the fully capitalist elements in football were still emerging out of a more traditional and community-based football culture and the capitalist and politically correct elements were not yet then clearly dominant (as is the case at AFL level today).

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<sup>235</sup> Armstrong, *Knowing the Score*, p. 134.

***Ben, Rob, Tony, and Mario, the Perth Modern SHS sub-gang***

Then, as mentioned previously, there were the two overweight Italian brothers, the elder Tony aged 13 and the younger Mario aged around 9. Tony had a friend, Ben McA., who was around 13-14-years-old and a head or so taller than Tony. Years later I became a Facebook friend of the same Ben McA. The three would always sit together and always wear the West Perth long-sleeved replica playing jerseys. Tony may have attended Perth Modern Senior High School as did his friend Rob, who was also a cheer squad member. Rob was also a friend of Ben but Ben attended the Catholic college John XXIII.<sup>236</sup> Cheer squad members often saw the father of Tony and Mario with his younger boys and girls, dropping the brothers off or watching the group quietly at a distance.

Ben, Rob, and Tony were very shy and quiet people. They were eager to please; they respected the group *as a group-for-itself* probably more than anyone else did; and they attended all or most of the home-and-away games. Tony, in particular, regarded it as an honour and a responsibility to be allowed to take flags home with him each week. Mike B. and I knew that at least he would not lose any on the train (he travelled by car) and so we entrusted him with more than one flag. Ben, Rob, and Tony were, as mentioned, shy lads who enjoyed the group but they tried much of the time to avoid upsetting people or outstaying their presumed welcome.

I recall that Tony and Mario were there, wearing as was their custom their long-sleeved West Perth replica jerseys, when the cheer squad attended Channel Seven's "World of Football" programme shot live on a Sunday from the social club rooms at Leederville Oval. The cheer squad also attended when the programme was shot live on another Sunday from Bassendean Oval social club rooms, home of Swan Districts Football Club. Non-club members were welcome to these events, and they helped to bring the game and the media closer to the grassroots supporters, and broke down the divide between paid-up club members and ordinary supporters. With these events alienation between football supporters was broken down and a more communal spirit began to operate. These events were typical of a more innocent era, although, paradoxically, behind the scenes at this time an independent WAFL

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<sup>236</sup> Source: Personal Facebook communication with Ben McA., 5 October 2017.

Commission had been set up to replace traditional leadership by the eight clubs.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, within a year or two this Commission, led by St George's Terrace businesspersons such as John Walker, Richard Colless, and Peter Fogarty, would pay the exorbitant fee of AUD4 million to join an expanded VFL competition through new super-team West Coast Eagles formed as part of the soon-to-fail sports and entertainment listed corporation Indian Pacific Limited (IPL). It was really true that, dialectically, everything morphs into its opposite, as Mao Zedong<sup>238</sup> wrote, or "it's always darkest before the dawn". Just as the powerbrokers of the WAFL and the media were taking the game back to the grassroots, by the "World of Football" live shoots and the open public invitation to the 1984 Sandover Medal Night, rising corporatism, of a particularly arrogant and unpleasant kind, was about to change the game irrevocably in Western Australia. When the vote of WAFL club presidents was held on 22 August 1986 to see whether the state would join the expanded VFL for 1987, only Bill Walker of Swan Districts and South Fremantle's Wayne Ryder, to their eternal credit, voted "no".<sup>239</sup>

I related well to Ben, Rob, and Tony and I think that they were closer to Mike B. and me than to any of the others. Without meaning to sound disrespectful towards them, they were the nearest the group had to anonymous "foot-soldiers" whereas all the others were brash and extroverted personalities, except perhaps for Pete C. and Rohan. Ben, Rob, and Tony respected the cheer squad as an organized group or a *group-for-itself*. They were old enough to know what the cheer squad was all about but young enough to regard the group from a certain objective distance because they were slightly too young to relate on equal terms with the core members.

Ben, Rob, and Tony gave the group some *existential and moral legitimacy* as being *something more than just a group of mates*. They regarded the cheer squad as a *legitimate organization* and Mike B. and I felt honoured because of that trust and respect. We felt some sort of an obligation to look after them and to include them in all group activities. Because they were happy to be foot-soldiers, the trio was not teased

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<sup>237</sup> Barker, A. J. (Tony) (2004), *Behind the Play...a History of Football in Western Australia from 1868* (Perth: West Australian Football Commission), Chapter 11, pp. 186-204 and see especially pp. 188-92, 195-7.

<sup>238</sup> Mao, "On contradiction", p. 128.

<sup>239</sup> Barker, *Behind the Play*, p. 202.



overly much and cheer squad members appreciated their presence whereas if the group had been just a group of mates the group members might have tried to shake them off. The cheer squad was a “public” group, to use today’s Facebook terminology, and open to all. Again the ethnic composition of the group mirrored that of West Perth’s playing group: West Perth’s league-team of this era had Chinese-Australian rover Les Fong and Italian-Australian ruck-rover Peter Menaglio (236 games played, 1977-89<sup>240</sup>), and the cheer squad also had its Chinese and Italian members. As mentioned, cheer squad members felt that there was something symmetrical and appropriate about this.

**“Robbie”, 14-years-old, “floater” / non-aligned, joined 1985**

I shall next mention “Robbie” who was the only full-time core member, if my memory serves me correctly, who joined the cheer squad for the 1985 season having not been a member in 1984. Robbie was a friend of Thommo’s from junior football and he also knew P.A. because of the Balga connection. Therefore, like Thommo, he was a natural link between sub-gangs and part of the glue between sub-gangs that held the broader cheer squad together. Blond-haired Robbie considered himself something of a star footballer and I recall that an actual football never left his hands. It was a big yellow one and he was always bouncing it on the ground and handballing it to himself.

Robbie was easily distracted and always talking to someone. Often he would sit on the first or second row and turn around to face the rear so that he could continually talk to people. I did not regard highly him doing this as he was not watching the game and I could probably be authoritarian at times with the looks that I gave! According to cheer squad ethics and etiquette, the reserves game, the half-time break, and after-the-game are the times reserved for socializing whereas people should watch the main game intently. If you are not watching the game how can you know when to wave the flags? Cheer squads are not like Sydney United’s Edensor Park Ultras, in New South Wales Premier League (NSWPL) soccer, who chant and bang drums throughout the match, on a continuous basis, and hence do not really have to watch the game. Unlike soccer ultras, a cheer squad does not chant and sing

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<sup>240</sup> Atkinson, *It’s a Grand Old Flag*, p. 367.

continually. I felt that there was plenty of time for everybody to claim their coveted seats behind the goals and to socialize before the start of the main game which, in those days, was always at 2.20pm. The after-match ritual is discussed in the next chapter.

I could not relate very well to Robbie but that probably reflected my problems and limitations as much as or more than it reflected Robbie's. Robbie had a characteristic of not looking a person in the eyes during a conversation. I tended to avoid talking to him, but I realized that the cheer squad needed all the committed core members that it could find. I was pleased that Robbie did have a number of people that he could relate to well within the group and his connection with Thommo was very strong. Robbie was also one of those people who very much enjoyed teasing P.A. If I am not mistaken I think that Robbie also lived in Balga but I would not put Robbie unambiguously in the "Balga faction". Instead Robbie was a "floater" who operated between sub-gangs and was closer to Thommo who also never really had a sub-gang (see Appendix A).

***Robert C., 15-years-old, occasional member, brother of Mike and Pete***

Lastly, I should mention the brother or step-brother of Mike C. and Pete C., Robert C. He was understood to be a more hardcore juvenile delinquent than either Mike or Pete. Cheer squad members knew of or heard about the offence he had allegedly served time for and it was quite a serious offence although I will not name it here. Robert (never "Rob" or "Robbie") joined the cheer squad on two or three occasions and group members made him feel welcome and he enjoyed the group. In terms of Robert's personality, he could be placed halfway between the extroverted Mike C. and the introverted Pete C. Robert was also in between the ages of Pete and Mike so around 15-years-old in 1984. Robert was fairly quiet when he was with the cheer squad but possibly that was because he did not know most of the group members well. Like all the others, he respected people and he gave no-one any trouble. Finally, Mike and Pete C. had a four-year-old girl niece (or cousin) whom they would sometimes supervise and drag around at matches. She probably came to games about as often as she did not.

## **Social class**

In terms of the social class of the cheer squad, how does it compare to Eric Dunning's "rougher sections of the working-class"<sup>241</sup>, Gary Armstrong et al.'s "working-class in general"<sup>242</sup> and / or John Hughson's "upper-level or respectable part of the working-class in comfortable homes"<sup>243</sup>? We could use two criteria: suburb where the person lived and / or more subjective factors such as personal style, manner of speaking, and dressing style. I will not go beyond the first criteria here. The group had a Carine group of two and a Booragoon group of two which can both be placed in the middle-class or professional middle-class. The group had a "Balga faction" of two and two others connected to that suburb and the group had the C. brothers who had spent considerable time in reform homes and were commonly perceived as having no fixed abode.

Balga has traditionally been perceived to be semi-criminal government housing. Wikipedia states that "[t]he name 'Balga' was adopted in 1954 and is the Noongar (Australian Aboriginal) word for the indigenous grass tree *Xanthorrhoea preissii*". I can recall, around 1996 or 1997, my car running out of petrol on Wanneroo Road in Balga on my way back home to Merriwa. Night was coming and I had to walk with my empty petrol can through the suburb to a service station. One man joined me on my walk, as he was heading in the same direction. The man was cheerful and friendly enough but he did show me a knife kept down under the lower leg of his jeans. That incident would be consistent with many outsiders' perceptions of a typical Balga day. Wikipedia writes further about Balga as follows:

"At the 2006 census, Balga had a population of 8,494.

Balga residents had a median age of 34, and median incomes were well below average for the Perth metropolitan area and the region — \$347 per week compared with \$513 per week in Perth, and \$526 in the North Metropolitan statistical region. The population of Balga was more ethnically diverse than the Perth average, with 57.7% born in Australia and significant minorities from

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<sup>241</sup> Eric Dunning cited in Astrinakis, "Subcultures of hard-core fans", p. 91.

<sup>242</sup> Armstrong and Harris, "Football hooliganism"; Hobbs and Robins "The boy done good".

<sup>243</sup> Hughson, "Football, folk dancing and fascism"; Hughson, "The Bad Blue Boys"; Hughson, "A tale of two tribes"; Hughson, "The boys are back in town"; Hughson, "Australian soccer's 'ethnic tribes'".

Sudan, Italy, Macedonia, Vietnam and Burma identified in the 2006 census. At the 2006 census, 4.49% of residents identified as Indigenous Australians".<sup>244</sup>

The more "respectable" southern half of the suburb managed to later (1994) get a name change to Westminster which downgraded the remaining Balga section still further in some people's eyes. The move to get the Westminster name (with its English-Establishment as opposed to Australian Aboriginal origins) shows the social stigma attached to the Balga name by certain people. However, clearly Balga's residents in 1984 and 1985 would have included fully-employed working-class *and* unemployed or underemployed "lumpenproletariat" or "dangerous classes". It would then have resembled the Whitechapel and Spitalfields of the era of the "Jack the Ripper" murders in 1888 East London where social historians indicate that respectable members of the working-class and some professional people lived on the main thoroughfares such as Commercial Road, Commercial Street, and Whitechapel High Street.<sup>245</sup> By contrast, the rougher and semi-criminal elements lived hand-to-mouth existences in "the evil quarter mile" which included the doss-houses of Dorset Street, Flower and Dean Street, Fashion Street, and Brick Lane.<sup>246</sup>

Our group members were from mixed social backgrounds: the group had middle-class and lumpenproletarians (to use the traditional Marxist term<sup>247</sup>) all lumped in together but the group members made it operate successfully for two years.

### ***Fraternal cheer squad ethics***

There was an egalitarian and fraternal atmosphere between the cheer squad members and the equivalent groups from other clubs consistent with the culture and the ethics of the Victorian and South Australian cheer squads of the era. As an example of Victorian cheer squad ethics in the 1970s and 1980s, members from different cheer squads used to

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<sup>244</sup> Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balga,\\_Western\\_Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balga,_Western_Australia) [accessed 19 January 2011].

<sup>245</sup> Scott, C. (2005), *Will the Real Mary Kelly ... ?* (London: Christopher Scott), p. 86.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>247</sup> Engels, F. (1968), "Preface to the Peasant War in Germany", in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers), p. 243; Marx, K. H. (1968), "The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers), pp. 138, 145, 168, 176, 178, 243; Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 797; Marx, K. H. and F. Engels (1968), "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers), p. 44.

shout the final match scores from their respective grounds across railway station platforms at Melbourne's Flinders Street station on Saturday evenings.<sup>248</sup> There was also a place called Classic Cafe in Melbourne city-centre where cheer squad members from different clubs would congregate and interact on Saturday nights after the regular home-and-away games.<sup>249</sup> In terms of WAFL cheer squad ethics, the cheer squad leaders' relationships with Perth and Claremont cheer squad members at grounds and in the city-centre were always cordial. Perth's cheer squad leader, Nick, and the Claremont cheer squad leader(s) might have been expatriate Victorians since they operated their respective cheer squads in the Victorian manner.

There was a combined Perth-Claremont cheer squad which unofficially represented Western Australia in the state match against Victoria at Subiaco Oval on Tuesday afternoon 17 July 1984.<sup>250</sup> The Perth-Claremont group invited the West Perth cheer squad to join them but the West Perth group declined<sup>251</sup> so that people in this group could attend separately with their own various gangs of school mates. The match was held on a school day (Tuesday) afternoon and so people "wagged" (skipped) school or work to go to the game. Being on a school day it made logistic sense to attend this match with school-mates rather than with "Saturday's heroes" because planning for the day could take place at school on the Monday. Also Mike B. and I felt that the ethical requirement to attend with school-mates overrode the ethical requirement to attend with the cheer squad since the match took place during school hours on a school day.

### ***The break-up of the cheer squad, 1986***

The familiar world of government high-schools and junior football clubs produces the appearance of sameness and an egalitarian atmosphere which is often genuine but also, to some extent, does hide real economic and social divisions as well as just diverse interests.<sup>252</sup> Each one of the

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<sup>248</sup> I have searched long and hard to locate this reference but so far the search has yielded no results.

<sup>249</sup> Muyt, *Maroon and Blue*, p. 139.

<sup>250</sup> Source: My personal notes compiled during the 1984 season.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> For an insight into the world of junior football clubs readers are referred to the retelling by Carlton AFL player Brendan Fevola of his junior days at the suburban Narre Warren club. Fevola, *Fev*, pp. 17-33.

group members of high-school age attended government high-schools (with the exception of Ben McA.) which are levelling environments. When I went to university in February 1986 it seemed to break the spell of sameness or maybe it just made me “feel different”. I no longer saw Mike B. regularly in 1986 as high-school was over and Mike may well have not returned to the group at all in 1986. With both of the founders approaching or over 18-years-old the wider world was opening up and new interests and challenges were coming to the fore.

I do regret giving up on the cheer squad so easily and casually but we also must remember that the times were changing by 1986. The WAFL Commission was fast putting together a deal to join the expanded VFL competition above the heads of ordinary football supporters.<sup>253</sup> This is not to imply that the majority of Western Australian football supporters did not in 1987 support the entry of West Coast Eagles into the expanded VFL but simply that ordinary football supporters were not directly consulted on the move through community consultation, public meetings, and / or some sort of voting process. Only in the year 2000 would the former East Fremantle and Swan Districts’ player and Claremont and Fremantle Dockers’ coach Gerard Neesham lead a resistance movement, *Save West Australian Football Lobby* or SWAFL, to try to re-claim the spirit of Western Australian football from the corporate people who had been first attracted to the game circa 1983-84.<sup>254</sup> All of these negotiations and distractions affected adversely the mood at the grassroots and WAFL crowds did fall off significantly in 1986 (total qualifying round crowds 623,000 or 7,417 per game) although the drop was nowhere near as great as the 50% further drop-off in 1987 (total qualifying round crowds 308,000 or 3,667 per game), the first year post-Eagles.<sup>255</sup> As a point of comparison, qualifying round crowds had been as high as 810,113 or 9,644 per game in 1970.<sup>256</sup>

West Perth also performed disappointingly on the field in 1986, dropping out of the final-four whereas in 1985, under new coach John Wynne, the league-team had finished third at the end of the home-and-away rounds<sup>257</sup>, and then played in and lost the first semi-final to give

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<sup>253</sup> For more details, as told by Bill Walker, see East, A. (2009), *75 Years of...Black & White, the Swan Districts Football Club* (Perth: Swan Districts Football Club), p. 153.

<sup>254</sup> On the SWAFL, see Barker, *Behind the Play*, pp. 353-6.

<sup>255</sup> The crowd figures are cited in Barker, *Behind the Play*, p. 241.

<sup>256</sup> See the Full Points Footy website at: [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/subiaco\\_\(2\).htm#Top](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/subiaco_(2).htm#Top) [accessed 7 January 2011].

the team an eventual fourth position. All of these factors led to the cheer squad quietly disintegrating before the members' eyes in the first few home-and-away games of 1986. It is still hard to believe that it could just die off quietly without anyone consciously killing it. Mike B. and I had put in great efforts to organize the cheer squad for two years and to keep strong and healthy relationships alive within the group (which is not as easy as it may sound with the benefit of hindsight). When this combined effort was no longer applied, the foot was off the accelerator, and the cheer squad simply vanished. I have not seen any of the other members since 1986 (or perhaps 1987 or 1988), not even at West Perth games. Mike B. and I caught up on the Gold Coast in September 2009 and again in Kalgoorlie on 14 July 2011. A picture in this book shows Mike B. (left) and me at the historic Exchange Hotel, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia on 14 July 2011. This picture was taken by a barmaid whom, appropriately enough given the themes in this book, was a London girl who supports West Ham United.

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<sup>257</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 203.

**Key events for the West Perth cheer squad** (source: my personal 1984 WAFL season notes compiled during 1984):

Round 6 (5 May): West Perth versus South Fremantle at Leederville Oval. The cheer squad was formed on this day.

Round 10 (Monday, 4 June): West Perth versus East Perth at Leederville Oval: I watched this match with school friend Roy George.

Round 12 (23 June): West Perth versus Claremont at Subiaco Oval: Group members went into the club rooms after the game. The group members first met P.A. and D.S.

Round 13 (30 June): West Perth versus South Fremantle at Subiaco Oval. The group members sat with the unofficial West Perth supporter group called "Grandstand Falcons".

Round 14 (7 July): West Perth versus Swan Districts at Leederville Oval: The group introduced the "Cop That" banner to the cheer squad (see Chapter 2).

Round 15 (14 July): West Perth versus Perth at Leederville Oval. The group was "humbled by Perth cheer squad." The group took two flags from the club shed. In the city-centre after the match there was "raucous singing" by the group.

17 July (Tuesday): Western Australia (WA) versus Victoria State of Origin match at Subiaco Oval. Mike B. and I took the "Cop That" banner. I attended with school and neighbourhood friends Mike B., Paul B., Chad S., Roy G., Paul D., Gilby, Peter L., Wayne D., and Nick. This group of friends arrived at 9.20am. Gary Ablett Senior kicked eight goals for the losers. Best players for WA were Brad Hardie, Ross Glendinning, and Steve Malaxos. Dean Warwick (West Perth) failed to make the WA team. The West Perth cheer squad was invited to join the combined Perth-Claremont cheer squad, which was representing WA that day, in the grandstand but we declined.

Round 16 (21 July): West Perth versus East Perth at Perth Oval. Mike B. lost his contact lens at Claisebrook Station after the match. The group had a "huge record cheer squad". Group members talked to West Perth coach Dennis Cometti prior to the match. The official time-clock was not working. It was a "thrilling last quarter" with great games being played by West Perth players John Gastevich and Derek Kickett.



*Kieran James*

My personal WAFL season notes do not extend past Round 16 (21 July) 1984. There were only five WAFL home-and-away rounds played after this date. West Perth did not qualify for the 1984 final round series.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The opposition and some big matches**

#### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I discuss some of the opposition supporters and cheer squads of the mid-1980s Golden Era in the WAFL. I also discuss some of the big games involving the respective opposition teams with a special focus on the 1985 first semi-final, West Perth's only finals game during the cheer squad era of 1984-86. This chapter begins with a discussion of the cheer squad's chants and its after-match ritual.

#### ***The West Perth Cheer Squad's chants***

I refer to the cheer squad's chants at various points in this book. Unlike many soccer supporters groups (such as Perth Glory's young Glory Fans United) our chanting was not continuous throughout the match. As the cheer squad always had around 15 to 20 people, and only on one particular day at Subiaco Oval was there more than 50 (refer to Chapter 1), the cheer squad lacked what Marsh terms "critical density"<sup>258</sup>. According to Marsh a critical density is needed for a group to begin to take on its own special dynamic where chants are naturally synchronized and people can feel that their own identity is submerged into that of the crowd. Marsh argues that usually around 100 people are need before this very subjective special group dynamic of "very marked unity"<sup>259</sup> begins.

The "West Perth clap clap clap" chant was uniformly used by the cheer squad in response to West Perth goals. This or other chants also occurred at various moments when the team was on an energy or creative rush or, by contrast, when it needed some encouragement. Chants usually ended after only a few repetitions although the "West Perth clap clap clap" chant after goals went on longer than the others. To some extent the volume, length, and number of chants depended on both people's moods and the state of the game. It should be mentioned that the cheer squad's other favourite chants included "Phil Bradmore

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<sup>258</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

clap clap clap” and “John Duckworth clap clap clap” and for Peter Menaglio “Saint Peter clap clap clap” which was somehow very appropriate given Menaglio’s Italian background. Group members appreciated and respected that West Perth was a multicultural club, we revelled in it, and there was no obvious racism among the group.

Group members would also sing “Johnnie Duckworth walks on water / tralalalala lalalala” with group members’ favourite West Perth players’ names being put into the chant. The reverse (uncomplimentary) version of this chant was “Ronnie Boucher walks on water / everybody knows that bullshit floats”. It should also be pointed out that the two “walks on water” chants (the complimentary one and its reverse) were actually sung rather than chanted. People may have been familiar with some of the chants and songs from the days of Fat Pam’s cheer squad. No chants or songs were actually “written” in the sense of people sitting down and consciously writing them. The cheer squad’s song about the inhabitants of the R.A. McDonald Stand at Bassendean Oval, to be referred to later, was more complex than the other songs / chants and it was an excellent and provocative one. It may have been inherited from Fat Pam’s cheer squad. If not, I would like to know the origins of this particular song and whether other clubs’ supporters sang it too.

The Grandstand Falcons used to sing “This Time (We’ll Get It Right)”, the original version of which was sung by the English national soccer team before the 1982 World Cup Finals.<sup>260</sup> It was suitable for West Perth because, like England, it had been many years since our last success and the club had been a regular source of disappointment for the longsuffering fans. We generally only sang the song when in the presence of the Grandstand Falcons because it was “their” song.

### ***The cheer squad’s after-match ritual***

In regards the after-match ritual, if the game was at Leederville Oval, the cheer squad members would run on to the field at the final siren, with flags waving in the air if it was a victory. Group members would also return the floggers promptly to the storerooms at the club. On some occasions group members might try to get into the dressing rooms if it

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<sup>260</sup> The single version (b/w “England We’ll Fly the Flag”) reached Number 2 in the UK charts and spent 13 weeks in the Top 75.

had been a particularly impressive victory. Then we would celebrate the victory with the players and the other hardcore supporters. I can recall that on a few occasions the rooms were open to all supporters. My personal 1984 season notes, compiled during 1984, state that cheer squad members went into the dressing rooms after the Round 12 West Perth versus Claremont game played at Subiaco Oval won by West Perth 21.20 (136) to Claremont 9.14 (68). This was also the first game when the group was joined by P.A. and D.S. Brian Atkinson<sup>261</sup> mentions that the coach of West Perth in 2011, the ex-Subiaco player Bill Monaghan, introduced a policy of opening up the change rooms after games regardless of the result.

Usually cheer squad members would kick their footballs kick-to-kick on the oval until it got dark. The group would remain largely intact during this time. The empirical fact that the cheer squad would remain intact during kick-to-kick and never formally join in with people from outside the cheer squad does support the proposition that the cheer squad was a “group-for-itself” rather than simply a “group-in-itself”. Eight-year-old Michael (“Half”) was always there on the oval with the group. His parents understood that this was a part of the group’s routine and group members realized that his welfare remained the group’s responsibility to a certain extent.

After it got dark cheer squad members would all leave the ground in a group of around 8 to 15 people and head for the train station (or the various bus stops if it was a home game). If it was an away game most of the complete group (excluding those six or seven people who came by cars such as Rohan, Courtney, Half, Ben, Rob, Tony, and Mario) would all get the train or bus back to the city-centre, still carrying the rolled-up flags. If it was an away game, a large group would head back by the train to the city-centre. The group would take over the back half of the bus or half a carriage on trains. The adrenaline and sweat from the kick-to-kick session would still be with the group members and the laughing and joking would fill the train carriage.

If it was a home game, only Mike B. and I and perhaps also Mike C. and Pete C. would take the Number 15 bus on Oxford Street back to Perth city-centre. The members of the “Balga group” (ranging from two to five people including P.A., D.S., Thommo, Thommo Junior, and

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<sup>261</sup> Personal Interview, 8 July 2011.

Robbie) would walk eastward along Vincent Street by themselves to take their own bus back to the northern suburbs. (If it was an away game, the remaining people would say their goodbyes at the dark and cold Wellington Street bus terminal or at the Perth central train station.) Only Mike B. and I would then head south through the city-centre four blocks to St George's Terrace to catch the Number 105 bus back to Booragoon. Occasionally Mike B. and I might have stopped at Hungry Jack's or McDonald's but, if I recall correctly, the bus timing was tight and we had to walk rapidly through the city-centre. As with the Victorian cheer squads at Flinders Street Station in the 1970s and 1980s, Mike B. and I would sometimes encounter the Claremont or Perth cheer squads in the city-centre and we were on good terms with both of those groups. Both of those cheer squads understood the Victorian cheer-squad culture of camaraderie and mutual support outside the grounds. My 1984 season notes state that, after West Perth defeated Perth 17.19 (121) to 10.13 (73) at Leederville Oval on 14 July (Round 15), the West Perth cheer squad was involved in "raucous singing" in the city-centre! This was probably just Mike B. and me although Mike and Pete C. could have been there.

### **Claremont Football Club**

I now move on to discuss key opponents and big matches involving those teams. First we should mention Claremont. Traditionally Claremont has been regarded as the club of and for the "college boys"<sup>262</sup> and the club has long been associated with an amateur approach to the game. Although only 1,000 people attended the match, the difference in culture and attitudes of the Claremont versus Port Adelaide Magpies supporters at the Subiaco Oval Foxtel Cup clash on 16 July 2011 was quite apparent. To cite the Full Points Footy website about Claremont supporters:

"For much of its history, if Dave Warner is to be believed, 'Claremont's supporters would arrive at the outer of other clubs, erect their deckchairs and then complain when other fans stood in front'. Prior to the 1980s Claremont

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<sup>262</sup> Casey, K. (n/d but probably 1996), *The Tigers' Tale: the Origins and the History of the Claremont Football Club* (Perth: Kevin Casey), pp. 187-90; Gorman, S. (2005), *BrotherBoys: the Story of Jim and Phillip Krakouer* (St. Leonard's: Allen & Unwin).

were cream-puff, card-carrying nancy [*sic*] boys, but that has all changed and nowadays Claremont are rarely seen down the puce [*sic*] end of town".<sup>263</sup>

To be fair, Full Points Footy does point out that: "Premiership pennants in elite Australian football competitions ... quite simply do not end up in the possession of ineffectual weaklings, and Claremont produced a number of flag-winning combinations well before the 1980s".<sup>264</sup> However, despite this, Claremont fans generally were not feared. No-one went to Claremont Oval the least bit apprehensive about the home-team supporters.

By the late-1970s and early-1980s, the club had shaken off its college boy image and pieced together, under the coaching of first Mal Brown and then Essendon Brownlow Medallist Graham Moss, a formidable collection of talented footballers, many of whom would go on to play VFL/AFL football. These talented footballers included Mike "Doc" Aitken (Carlton); John Annear (Collingwood, Richmond, and West Coast); Wayne Blackwell (Carlton); Allen "Shorty" Daniels (Footscray); Ken Hunter (Carlton); Jim and Phil Krakouer (North Melbourne, St Kilda, and Footscray); and Warren Ralph (Carlton). As the Full Points Footy website comments: "Moss coached Claremont for ten seasons, during which time the club fielded some of the most star-studded line ups in Western Australian football history".<sup>265</sup> In the 1981 grand final, Claremont was formidable, using the powerful combination of Graham Moss (ruck), Jim Krakouer (rover), and Warren Ralph (full-forward), to defeat a very strong South Fremantle team. Curtin University's Sean Gorman, in his book on Jim and Phil Krakouer, provides a detailed description of this violent match.<sup>266</sup> In the late-1980s, the Claremont club would go on to produce the outstanding West Coast players Chris Lewis and Guy McKenna.

Unfortunately, for the brilliant Claremont, the club was not the only WAFL powerhouse of the early-1980s. In terms of not only individual playing talent but also well-drilled, well-disciplined, and well-coached teams, the WAFL of the early- to mid-1980s was remarkable. In most

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<sup>263</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont\\_Part\\_One.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont_Part_One.htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont\\_Part\\_Two.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Claremont_Part_Two.htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>266</sup> Gorman, *BrotherBoys*.

eras Moss's Claremont would have won more than the one premiership but it simply could not defeat the brilliant, emergent Swan Districts with Swans defeating Claremont in both the 1982 and 1983 grand finals. The Claremont club historian Kevin Casey writes that many long-term Claremont supporters believe that the Tigers should have won three premierships during the coaching reign of Graham Moss (1977-86).<sup>267</sup> Similarly, John Todd made the comparison with the West Perth team of the early-1950s which was excellent but always just one step below the South Fremantle team of that era.<sup>268</sup> Dawson writes that: "The greater versatility of the Swans sides, plus an edge in mental toughness, were important factors in denying Claremont premiership success in 1982 and '83, according to John [Todd], who felt the Tigers probably had an edge in talent".<sup>269</sup>

I can clearly remember trying to place a bet with the Claremont supporter and mathematics teacher at Applecross Senior High School, Mrs. Macklin, on the 1982 or 1983 grand final result, only to be told (and this is definitely an exact quote): "I don't bet with students"! She was quite wise since, regardless of the year, my money would have been on Swans and I would have won. By 1984 and 1985 the Claremont star had begun to fade as the player drain to the VFL/AFL had taken most of the talent out of the team. By 1984-85, Ron Alexander's East Fremantle and Haydn Bunton Junior's Subiaco were the emerging power teams as Swan Districts and Claremont had been five years earlier. Both these clubs, East Fremantle and Subiaco, contested the last two grand finals of the pre-West Coast era, with East Fremantle winning narrowly in 1985 and Subiaco winning convincingly in 1986.<sup>270</sup>

### ***The Claremont cheer squad***

The West Perth cheer squad had a good relationship with Claremont's cheer squad which congregated behind the northern-end goals at Claremont Oval. Their leader was a friendly, tall, brown-haired guy who had a Victorian style duffel coat with "Claremont Peter 15 Jamieson" on

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<sup>267</sup> Casey, *The Tigers' Tale*, p. 139.

<sup>268</sup> John Todd cited in Dawson, B. (2004), *John Todd: Six Decades of Footy* (West Leederville: Cambridge Publishing), p. 210.

<sup>269</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, p. 210.

<sup>270</sup> See the dedicated East Fremantle and Subiaco pages at John Devaney's website, Full Points Footy.

the back. I either can't recall or never knew his name. Our cheer squad took a large group to Claremont Oval once or twice in 1984 and 1985. I can only remember single trips to Bassendean Oval, Claremont Oval, Lathlain Park, Subiaco Oval, and Perth Oval, but the records suggest more than one game at those venues from May 1984 to August 1985. Therefore, either the cheer squad only attended once or my memory has conflated two visits into one for some or all of those venues.

Claremont's cheer squad was enthusiastic and dedicated and the West Perth cheer squad certainly respected it. At Claremont Oval, the West Perth cheer squad occupied the seats behind the southern-end goals while the Claremont cheer squad sat behind the northern-end goals. They had to pass by the West Perth cheer squad to get to their seats since they mostly arrived from Claremont train station at the oval's southern-end; whenever we met our two groups exchanged friendly greetings. Claremont had probably the second-largest and best-organized cheer squad behind Perth FC in 1984 and 1985. I believe that both groups were probably led by expatriate Victorians who operated the cheer squads in line with Victorian cheer squad culture and ethics. At Claremont Oval the West Perth cheer squad matched the Claremont cheer squad in terms of the total number of flags and banners although the West Perth group as usual (for away games) did not bring its floggers. The West Perth cheer squad members were especially proud of the group's 1.2 metre x 1.2 metre "Cop That" banner referred to in an earlier chapter.

At away games, especially, there was a carnival atmosphere among our cheer squad because cheer squad members felt no "obligation" or "responsibility" in terms of defending home-team territory or honour. It was like a day-out or a day at the seaside as most people did not normally travel to other parts of the metropolitan area, being constrained by school commitments, public transport timetables, and personal finances. When cheer squad members saw people arrive during the reserves game, in dribs and drabs of singles, twos, and threes, the newcomers would each receive a warm welcome. Many people, especially in the cheer squad's first year, would walk towards our group hesitatingly and a warm welcome was needed to get them to sit with our group. At away games it was impossible to know how many people the cheer squad would get. Non-regulars would often congregate with the



cheer squad at away games as the cheer squad was the most *visible* group of West Perth support. In addition to the cheer squad there was always Grandstand Falcons in the grandstand, a supporters' group which had no flags or banners but was made up of hearty singers and chanters (refer back to Chapter 1). That group's members were a few years older than the cheer squad members (they were probably then in their twenties) but the cheer squad members knew them all by sight.

### **West Perth Football Club**

In the early- and mid-1980s, West Perth had a reasonable team and, even if it finished fifth or sixth at the end of the season, on any given day you would give the team at least a 40% chance of winning no matter whom the opposition was. As the Full Points Footy website recounts, West Perth inherited from the Graham Farmer years in the late-1960s and early-1970s a fast, skilful, run-on style of play especially suited to the team's speedy on-ballers such as Ron Davis (13 games played, 1984-85); Les Fong; John Gastevich (61 games, 1983-88); Ross Gibbs (97 games, 1979-83); Derek Kickett (38 games, 1984-86); Dean Laidley; Peter Menaglio (236 games, 1977-89); George Michalczyk (58 games, 1982-86); Peter Murnane (36 games, 1982, 1985-87); David Palm (91 games, 1980-82, 1990-91); and the late Chris Stasinowsky (51 games, 1979-82). As the Full Points Footy website explains, citing Farmer himself halfway through the quote:

"Under Farmer, West Perth developed a fast, open, play on brand of football similar in style to that produced by Geelong in the VFL, or Sturt in South Australia. The club's training regime maximised physical fitness, endeavoured to habituate players to the sorts of psychological pressure and physical duress they could anticipate during matches, and inculcated in them the importance of making the best possible decision, from a range of alternatives, whenever they gained possession of the ball. As Farmer himself remarked, 'My basis of football was to develop a natural habit, where people automatically responded in the correct manner. The first commitment is always to get the ball; it's what you do with the ball after that that will decide how far you take it down the field. If there were five or six variables to make a play, they had to pick the right one..... The basis of my training was always to give it to a footballer who was moving down the field. We were giving them the ball as they were moving down the field'".<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west\\_perth\\_\(3\).htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west_perth_(3).htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

Furthermore, a leading football writer with *The West Australian*, Gary Stocks described West Perth in 1986 as follows: "West Perth are widely regarded as league football's most skilful team".<sup>272</sup> Strong ruckmen and physical players were the team's weaknesses. Generally the key forward and back positions down the centre of the ground, excluding centre-half-forward in the years when either Brian Adamson or Phil Bradmore held down the position, were the team's weak areas. Especially if a key player was injured the team would often run into difficulties. Key position defenders, Graeme Comerford (80 games, 1982-86) and 1975 premiership player Geoff Hendriks, were effective and dependable - albeit not as charismatic as former full-back, the earringed and mulleted Ray Holden (102 games, 1979-83, 1987-89), who departed for Melbourne (VFL/AFL) at the end of the 1983 season.

West Perth was fortunate in that, one year after Ben Jager (135 games, 1977-83), its first-choice lead ruckman since the late-1970s, retired, John Duckworth returned to the playing field. However, Duckworth mainly played centre-half-back in 1985 with new country recruit, 24-year-old Kim Rogers from Tammin (29 games, 1985-86), performing remarkably well in Jager's place. In fact Rogers' rise was a major explanatory factor behind West Perth's return to final round football in 1985.<sup>273</sup> The return of the former Hawthorn premiership player Peter Murnane and the veteran rover Corry Bewick (128 games, 1977-82 and 1985-86) and the debut of Darren Bewick (52 games, 1985-87) were also significant events for the senior team and for the club in 1985. Murnane had given the team maturity, poise, drive, and class in the centre of the ground and he had proved hard to replace. He was definitely one reason why the team had excelled on-the-field in the 1982 season and then struggled in the subsequent two years. The ex-Hawthorn premiership player's VFL/AFL experience had made him more of a strategic thinker and he was mentally harder and less error-prone than many WAFL footballers.

West Perth did have a strong backline in the early- and mid-1980s, with the reliable Perth defender Neil Fotheringham (64 games, 1980-83 and 66 games for Perth from 1975-79) crossing over to West Perth,

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<sup>272</sup> Stocks, G. (1986), "Smith gives Demons more grit", *The West Australian*, 31 March, p. 68.

<sup>273</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 205.

while Ross Prunster (159 games, 1973-79 and 36 games for Perth in 1980-81 and 1984) and Mark Washfold (41 games, 1978-80 and 66 games for Perth from 1981-84) went the other way. Other players involved in this lively cross-town traffic between Perth and West Perth were Doug Simms to West Perth (32 games, 1983-85 and 93 games for Perth from 1977-83) and, in the opposite direction, John Gavranich (39 games, 1980-83 and 126 games for Perth from 1984-91), Mick Rea (21 games, 1979-81 and 121 games for Perth from 1981-88), and the late Chris Stasinowsky (51 games, 1979-82 and 31 games for Perth from 1985-86). Atkinson writes as follows: "Chris Stasinowsky also played 26 games for South Fremantle in 1982-1984. He kicked 11 goals against West Perth in one game".<sup>274</sup> Without wanting to cast aspersions on the fine contributions made to West Perth by both Fotheringham and Simms, it is far from certain, based on the information presented in this paragraph, that West Perth got the best out of its trades with Perth during the drought era. With so many trades between the two clubs, with hindsight, it is easily possible to perceive the two clubs as having been one. If a merger had to happen, a West Perth merger with Perth would be far more palatable to me than a merger with East Perth, the traditional enemy of both Perth and West Perth. I am sure that many Perth supporters would agree with these sentiments.<sup>275</sup>

West Perth also received good service from its South Fremantle recruits, wingman Phil Cronan (22 games, 1983) and rover Paul Mountain (21 games, 1983), although, unfortunately, neither remained at the club beyond the single season. It is interesting to note that very few or no West Perth players crossed from West Perth to East Perth during the pre-West Coast era. This perhaps reveals the depth of negative feeling between the two clubs. One of the few players to head in the opposite direction, in the post-Polly Farmer years, was centre-man George Michalczyk. Although not quite as much of a sensation as Maurice "Mo" Johnston's 1989 move from Celtic to Rangers, where he became that club's first high-profile Roman Catholic player<sup>276</sup>,

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<sup>274</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 19 November 2011.

<sup>275</sup> See the discussion between the author and Perth supporter Adrian Gibson at the following link: <http://waflgoldenera.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/round-11-1976-west-perth-1417-101-d.html> [accessed 29 October 2016].

<sup>276</sup> McColl, G. (2008), *The Official Biography of Celtic: if you know the History* (London: Headline Publishing), p. 290; O'Kane, *Celtic Soccer Crew*, pp. 71-3.

Michalczyk's "defection" from East Perth was very well received at its cross-town rival and he would later go on to coach West Perth.

Generally West Perth struggled in wet weather and the team also struggled against very strong physical teams although occasionally such teams would be showed up by the Cardinals for their lack of pace and sixth sense. Especially at Leederville Oval, on beautiful fine winter days with the home crowd in full voice, West Perth played brilliant football during the premiership drought era (1976-86) and it was more than capable of inflicting defeat upon any team. Statistically this is the case as Atkinson's history section shows that, in the pre-West Coast Eagles section of the drought era from 1976-86, West Perth often defeated the eventual premier team twice in a season, including Perth in 1977 (two wins); East Perth in 1978 (two wins); Swan Districts in 1982 (two wins) and 1984 (two wins); and East Fremantle in 1985 (two wins). This remains a strong record but it is also a clear case of potential unfulfilled. Although the club did not suffer the same exodus of players to Victoria as other higher-profile and trendier teams, Ross Gibbs later played 253 games (1984-94) for Glenelg in the SANFL<sup>277</sup>, including the two pre-Adelaide Crows era premierships of 1985-86<sup>278</sup>, and David Palm was a strong and consistent contributor at Richmond in the VFL/AFL (104 games, 1983-88<sup>279</sup>). Palm developed into a consistent centre-man for Richmond over a number of years and he deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as the legendary Richmond centre-men who preceded him in that position Geoff Raines and the late Maurice Rioli.

Perhaps West Perth's best known football exports, in the post-Farmer era, have been Darren Bewick, Derek Kickett, and Dean Laidley as well as the coach turned football commentator Dennis Cometti. Generally West Perth's best players were undervalued and under-recognized during the drought era. Contemporaneous newspaper reports in *The West Australian* refer to both Bradmore and Menaglio as "underrated" suggesting that they should have polled more Sandover Medal votes than they did. For example, Gary Stocks, in his 1985 first semi-final match report, states that: "Bradmore received a meagre total of 14 [1985 Sandover] medal votes, a classic case of where the work done by a player during a season was undervalued".<sup>280</sup> In relation to the

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<sup>277</sup> Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ross\\_Gibbs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ross_Gibbs) [accessed 12 April 2011].

<sup>278</sup> Full Points Footy website, <http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/g.htm> [accessed 12 April 2011].

<sup>279</sup> Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Palm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Palm) [accessed 12 April 2011].

1985 first semi-final, Stocks went on to say that Bradmore was “the best man afield ... in the opinion of some”.<sup>281</sup> About the inaugural Eagles squad member, John Gastev (who was originally known as John Gastevich), Stocks comments as follows after the first West Perth game of the 1987 season versus East Perth: “He is one of the most underrated players in WA, with the ability to win the hard ball and pinpoint delivery”.<sup>282</sup>

### ***Sandover Medal Night, Perth Entertainment Centre, 27 August 1984***

I will now discuss the WAFL Sandover Medal Night held at the now demolished Perth Entertainment Centre on Monday 27 August 1984. This was the first time ever that the fairest-and-best player award presentation night had been opened to the general public and it has never been opened to the public again. I view the move as part of an effort to “take the game to the people”, a move towards empowerment, at the same time as the WAFL commissioners were simultaneously disempowering people by negotiating to be part of an expanded VFL over the heads of the ordinary club supporters and even over two club presidents.

The Perth Entertainment Centre (opened on 27 December 1974 and closed in August 2002) held around 8,200 people. Tickets were sold to the Sandover Medal Count for a reasonable fee, three dollars per person or around the cost of a match-day concession ticket, and supporters were allocated specific areas within the venue according to the club they supported. Our group made an effort to attend and secure tickets for the members and for the younger people in the group such as Half and Thommo Junior (Thommo’s younger brother aged around eight). Given that the Medal Night was held on a weekday, winter’s evening in a city-centre venue (in an era prior to mass gentrification of the inner-city) not surprisingly the main group of people in attendance were the hardcore cheer squad members carrying their big flags and banners. Perth, Claremont, Subiaco, West Perth, and East Perth all had large vocal cheer squad groups at the venue that night. Of course our group cheered and waved its flags when a West Perth player received a

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<sup>280</sup> Stocks, G. (1985a), “Disappointing end for Kim Rogers”, *The West Australian*, 2 September, p. 72.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>282</sup> Stocks, G. (1987), “West Perth pace key factor”, *The West Australian*, 28 March, p. 200.

vote just as we would have done behind the goals on any match day. Fitting in with the carnival mood of the whole evening, there were three tied winners of the award, Michael Mitchell and Steve Malaxos of Claremont and Peter Spencer of East Perth.<sup>283</sup>

The football historian Tony Barker<sup>284</sup> is extremely unfair when he writes that: "The result was far more discordant than the mere presence of women could have been, with up to 3,000 fans jeering the tallying of votes for players from rival clubs". I was there and the general behaviour that night was very good because the crowd was made up in large part of young and dedicated football supporters most of whom were cheer squad members and under the supervision of cheer squad leaders. The back page of *The West Australian* on the Wednesday after the Monday night count was very critical of the event and the booing and jeering of flag-waving supporters. Various identities were trotted out to condemn the night. Surprisingly, it was not *The West Australian's* chief sporting writer, the late Geoff Christian (1934-98), who wrote the piece but some unknown female journalist, Linda Byrne, perhaps drafted in from the front section of the newspaper. One wonders even whether the reporting of the Monday night medal count was held back until the Wednesday paper so that the count results were not reported prior to the reporting of the public backlash.

The sensationalist article by Byrne opens as follows: "Telephone switchboards ran hot at West Australian Newspapers, Channel 7 and talk-back radio programmes yesterday as people protested about the handling of this year's Sandover Medal presentation".<sup>285</sup> The writer goes on to explain how callers were "disgusted" because the "winners were booed by jeering flag-waving fans" during the two-hour event which was also telecast live by Channel 7. George Michalczyk of West Perth was forthright, hostile, and even a tad moralistic and superior in his comments spoken in his capacity as head of the Players' Association: "It was a commercial failure and a TV failure. I don't think there are any positive things to say for it. I think the general public reaction will say that this will never happen again at the Entertainment Centre".<sup>286</sup> Of course the vast majority of the fans present enjoyed themselves tremendously

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<sup>283</sup> Casey, *The Tigers' Tale*, p. 156.

<sup>284</sup> Barker, *Behind the Play*, p. 194.

<sup>285</sup> Byrne, L. (1984), "Protests hit Sandover 'muddle'", *The West Australian*, 29 August, p. 128.

<sup>286</sup> George Michalczyk cited in *ibid.*, p. 128.

by behaving exactly as they would on any match day. Michalczyk need not have worried himself too much: by 1987 most of these noisy, teenaged, flag-waving fans would stop attending WAFL games (having shifted over to support West Coast Eagles in the expanded VFL).

Somewhat more tactfully than most commentators and not wanting to upset either the moralizers or the fans, the then WAFL president Vince Yovich simply said that the event “lacked atmosphere”<sup>287</sup> which it may have done, from the TV perspective, because of the cavernous and generic nature of the venue. To his credit, East Fremantle’s coach Ron Alexander simply gave full marks to Channel 7 for attempting something different. A Channel 7 spokesperson, station manager Mr. Alan Richards, was misquoted by Linda Byrne, perhaps deliberately. At the start of the back page article Richards is proclaimed as having been surprised by the hostile reaction and Byrne takes this to mean the hostile reactions of the supporters on the night. In fact his full quote appears later in the same article and it is very clear that he is expressing surprise at the “hostile reactions” of the people who contacted TV and radio stations and the newspaper to complain about the count on the day after the event. Richards correctly and sensibly pointed out that the fan reaction on that night was the same as you would hear on the terraces on any match-day. In Richards’ words: “As a television person watching the event last night I thought it was the right approach and was somewhat surprised by the reaction”.<sup>288</sup> Clearly the reaction Richards is referring to here is that of the bourgeois, public policers of decency and decorum on the Tuesday rather than the reaction of the fans at the count on the Monday night. You cannot invite the public to a venue known for loud rock concerts by bands such as AC/DC and KISS and charge a very cheap admission price and then realistically expect black-tie, gala-dinner behaviour.

The moralistic public uproar resulted in the 1985 medal count night being shifted back to its traditional venue, The Golden Ballroom of the Sheraton Perth Hotel, and the ordinary supporters were again excluded. Nowadays the Brownlow (AFL) and Sandover Medal (WAFL) nights are corporate events at luxury hotel ballrooms, and players and WAGS (wives and girlfriends) dress up in their showy fineries. The counts have

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<sup>287</sup> Vince Yovich cited in *ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>288</sup> Alan Richards cited in *ibid.*, p. 128.

become fashion shows and places to be seen. Carlton AFL player Brendan Fevola's behaviour at the 2009 Brownlow Medal Count included vomiting, swearing, spilling beer, simulated sex acts, and molestation of women.<sup>289</sup> No teenage cheer squad member behaved in such ways at the Perth Entertainment Centre in August 1984 although some of us might have accidentally spilled our soft-drinks! Nonetheless, the ruling-class of football decided that it most definitely did not want the lumpenproletariat supporters to be in such close proximity at future counts. There was even an early sneaky attempt to erase the 1984 Sandover Medal Count Night from football history with the 1985 edition of Christian et al.'s *The Footballers* book mentioning neither the count night nor the three winners' names (but including the three winners in the list of medal winners on p. 183).<sup>290</sup>

### **East Perth Football Club**

East Perth was and still remains today West Perth's arch-rivals. East Perth was a strong club throughout the 1960s and up to 1978. However, the Perth Oval-based club generally failed to match it in the 1980s with the new powerhouses South Fremantle, Claremont, and Swan Districts (in the early-1980s) and East Fremantle and Subiaco (in the mid-1980s). The East Perth club had possibly begun to suffer the after-effects of a declining junior base in its inner-city areas, a factor that may also partially explain Perth FC's poor years from 1980 onwards. The declining junior base was the primary factor behind West Perth's 1994 move to a more lucrative junior zone in the Joondalup area in Perth's outer northern suburbs.<sup>291</sup> In hindsight, perhaps, the 1978 grand final between East Perth and Perth represented the end of an era, the last hurrah of the traditional inner-city clubs.

My belief then was that East Perth supporters were an overly serious and macho bunch that believed that their team was the toughest and most ruthless. They generally did not respect other clubs at all and

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<sup>289</sup> Fevola, *Fev*, pp. 252-7; Franklin, R. (2012), *Fev Unauthorised: the Biography of Brendan Fevola, Football's Flawed Genius*, paperback edition (Richmond: Slattery Media Group), Chapter 8, pp. 114-37; Hinde, S. and V. Mayberry (2011), "New Year's leave: Fev's career on knife's edge after latest drama", *The Sunday Mail [Brisbane]*, 2 January, p. 3.

<sup>290</sup> Christian, G., Lee, J. and B. Messenger (1985), *The Footballers: a History of Football in Western Australia* (Perth: St George Books).

<sup>291</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 224.



especially West Perth. It was mostly East Perth fans who used the racist “Garlic Muncher” tag for West Perth supporters because, like South Fremantle, West Perth had always been (or at least since the 1950s) a multicultural club both in terms of its playing squads and its supporter base. The club welcomed these supporters and players and gained a reputation as a multicultural club. Both West Perth and South Fremantle represent districts with large Croatian / Yugoslav and Italian populations. Most of the ethnic soccer clubs, associated with the Croatian, Greek, and Italian communities, are based in the West Perth and South Fremantle catchment areas. Despite this, South Fremantle has never been burdened by a tag such as “Garlic Munchers” possibly because East Fremantle fans have always been far too gentlemanly and self-assured of their own worth to resort to such insulting labelling of a rival club. The other six WAFL clubs tended to be more strictly Anglo in the 1970s and 1980s, although East Perth and Swan Districts have had significant numbers of Aboriginal players and supporters.

The official “Royals” nickname for the East Perth club was an enigma. On the one hand, I felt that some East Perth supporters were somewhat embarrassed by it because it did not gel neatly with their working-class (Aussie not British) tough-guy image. This interpretation is based on the “Australia as a rugged colony” tradition which played a major role in Ashes Test cricket matches in the 1970s. On the other hand, the Royals’ nickname for East Perth and the club’s crown symbol could have been viewed in white-supremacist / British nationalist terms. If this meaning wasn’t overt during the 1980s (it clearly wasn’t) it was arguably at least there in the background playing with people’s collective subconscious, and especially those of West Perth supporters when they were hit with the “Garlic Munchers” tag. It is unfortunate that political correctness arrived too late and Royals’ fans were not castigated for their insulting use of the racist “Garlic Munchers” label for West Perth fans during the WAFL’s Golden Era. In the 1980s East Perth and East Fremantle fans were probably those least likely to wear club colours at their games although this is admittedly a subjective memory.

Our West Perth cheer squad believed that East Perth players and fans took themselves too seriously and lacked charm and humour. The cheer squad members also felt that, although both clubs were mid-table in 1984-85, West Perth had a faster running and more skilful side. West

Perth fans thought that West Perth's 1982 recruitment of East Perth centreman George Michalczyk (whose nephew is the West Coast Eagles player Dean Cox) was a master-stroke as he fitted the team's game plan well and he was also more of a physical player than many at West Perth. The team's token tough-guy in the late-1970s and 1980s was the Vietnam War veteran John Duckworth but with Duckie there was a humorous side to him (like Carlton's Peter "Percy" Jones and North Melbourne's Peter "Crackers" Keenan<sup>292</sup>) and he tended to be primarily a ball-player and not one for king-hits off the ball.

Duckie meant a huge amount for player and fan morale; it could be argued that his return to the senior team at age 35 in 1985 was another reason behind the team's finals' appearance in that year although he did not himself play in the first semi-final versus Swan Districts which the club lost. Duckworth missed the last two qualifying games of the 1985 season due to the after-effects of swallowing a fish bone.<sup>293</sup> He had not trained for three weeks as at the Monday of the lead-up week and had lost seven kilograms.<sup>294</sup> He intended to resume training on the Thursday night before the first semi-final but ultimately he did not play.<sup>295</sup> Duckworth surely must have enjoyed John Wynne's philosophy of having minimal pre-season training. He inspired the players and was worth much more to West Perth than his kick, marks, and handballs tally might suggest. The extremely charismatic and popular centre-half-forward Phil "Spock" Bradmore fits into the same category. Atkinson reports that Peter Menaglio won the Breckler Medal for club fairest-and-best player in 1984 while "Spock" Bradmore won the medal in the following year.<sup>296</sup>

East Perth back then had a large number of fair-weather fans (as of course did West Perth) who would turn out in force for the big games and sit on the grassed scoreboard banks. Most of these have gone on to support one of Perth's AFL clubs. With East Perth there were certainly dumb-thug elements among the fair-weather army. As an example, when I went with Tim B., an East Perth supporter, to the big West Perth versus East Perth game at Leederville Oval on 26 August 1978, my

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<sup>292</sup> Frost, *Immortals*, p. 236.

<sup>293</sup> Christian, G. (1985b), "Injuries sour West Perth's bid for glory", *The West Australian*, 26 August, p. 88.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, Appendix 5, p. 273.

father lagged behind us as he had to lock up all the car doors manually. As this was happening, Tim staged a mock fight with me on the footpath. Just as in a cliché-ridden movie, an old panel van, the vehicle of choice for mentally challenged thugs back in the day, drove past Tim B. and me at that moment, and shouted out some brain-dead encouragement to the one wearing the East Perth colours. East Perth's travelling supporters would sit on the huge Leederville Oval scoreboard bank at West Perth home games and, as mentioned, usually they did not wear the club colours. This grass bank has largely disappeared today, in the interests of the gentrification of the ground and the takeover of the top part of the grass bank by the Town of Vincent, but it can be seen in its full glory in the picture on page 219 of Atkinson's book.<sup>297</sup> On very big match days, most of the scoreboard bank crowd would end up standing rather than sitting (at least at the top and on the sides and edges).

East Perth had an organized cheer squad in the mid-1980s. David Lockhart posted on the *Lost WAFL* Facebook community page on 4 December 2013 to explain that he had been "the leader of this rabble" from around 1982 to around 1988.<sup>298</sup> He writes that the cheer squad was funded by the East Perth club and had 40 members at one point. He says his group knew the other cheer squads well and participated in the combined State of Origin cheer squad a few times. Our West Perth group did not know any of the members of David Lockhart's cheer squad although Lockhart's group knew Fat Pam's group which continued making the banners for the West Perth players to run through into the 1984 season.

The East Perth fair-weather fans back in the day all expanded significant effort trying to look macho and serious. Ironically, Leederville Oval has now become East Perth's home ground since the club was forced to leave Perth Oval for the Perth Glory Soccer Club. It is indeed ironic that the East Perth club, which prided itself on its macho, Aussie, tough-guy image over the years, would have to leave its home ground for soccer, the so-called sport of, to use the title of the late Johnny Warren's autobiography, "fairies, wogs, and poofters" (yes, Garlic Munchers).<sup>299</sup> One might even want to refer to the concept of "karma"

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<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>298</sup> Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lost-WAFL/563746750348335> [accessed 5 December 2013].

<sup>299</sup> Warren, J. (2003), *Sheilas, Wogs and Poofters: an Incomplete Biography of Johnny Warren and*

here, a concept that many of the middle-aged, and upper-middle-class “Buddhists” living in the now gentrified East Perth suburb can probably relate to. As the Full Points Footy website comments: “East Perth actually played its home matches at Leederville [Oval] during season 2000 owing to Perth Oval being consigned to the heretics, i.e. it was needed for the ineptly named ‘Perth Glory’s’ soccer fixtures”.<sup>300</sup>

I can remember attending the second last West Perth versus East Perth game ever played at Perth Oval on Monday 1 June 1998. I sat under the tin shed in the south-western corner, just to the right of the main grandstand if you were looking across from the scoreboard bank. There was an official crowd of 4,853 people, a very high crowd for the post-Fremantle Dockers era. East Perth actually won that day, 16.8 (104) to 8.10 (58), although West Perth made the grand final in that year only to lose it to East Fremantle.<sup>301</sup> This 1 June 1998 match was the last WAFL game ever to be played at Perth Oval in front of a crowd exceeding three thousand people.

Despite East Perth vacating Perth Oval, West Perth supporters did not have the last laugh because East Perth then joined Subiaco as the new co-tenants of Leederville Oval! The ground has now become a yuppie, boutique style ground with most of the scoreboard wing gone (it can be viewed on Google Earth) as well as the around-the-ground seating including the cheer squad’s seats behind the northern-end goal. In the general public parts of the ground only the seats in front of the tin shed in the north-west corner remain. Subiaco has built a tasteful new social club / grandstand in between the main grandstand and the tin shed which, if my memory serves me correctly, was home to a stepped section of gravel or concreted terracing (or an upwards sloping gravelled or concreted section) topped with a bar and / or a hot food caravan back in the 1980s (similar to the still-existing can bar terrace at Lathlain Perk). Despite all the changes, I still feel very much at home in the famous old ground. The old gates in the south-western corner have gone replaced by new Phil Matson Gates. It was somewhat cute and very politically correct to name these gates after Phil Matson who was a successful player and coach at *both* East Perth and Subiaco in the first half of the

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*Soccer in Australia*, with A. Harper and J. Whittington (North Sydney: Random House).

<sup>300</sup> Full Points Footy website, footnote 18, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/east\\_perth\\_\(2\).htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/east_perth_(2).htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>301</sup> The match scores are taken from Atkinson, *It’s a Grand Old Flag*, p. 342.

twentieth century. He can't have had many challengers. I can't imagine that the Alex Hamilton Gates or the Kevan Sparks Gates would have been deemed suitable names, these being the only two players I can think of from more recent years who played for both clubs. Oh, wait...The Peter Spencer Gates? I would like to see that!

The fact that Leederville Oval has become East Perth's home ground does not sit well with me, but, as Brian Atkinson pointed out in personal e-mail correspondence, once West Perth moved out any other club had the right to move in. Clearly Subiaco, after being forced out of its Subiaco Oval headquarters by the new power-brokers of football the Western Australian Football Commission (WAFC), perceived that a move effectively just down the street to Leederville Oval would pose the least threat to its identity as a name change would not be needed. Ironically and sadly, the only visible signs of red-and-blue I observed when I visited Leederville Oval on the peaceful and sunny winter morning of Wednesday 6 July 2011 was the colouring of the brand name of Medibank Private, the current sponsors of the ground, at the back of the old main grandstand. The ground is presently a mish-mash of colours, a genuine post-modern collage, as you can see the blue-and-black of East Perth only 20-metres away from the maroon-and-gold of Subiaco. However, despite this, I still love the dear old ground (as I also love Dorrien Gardens).

Evidence of the East Perth fair-weather fan mentality is the fact that the club's average attendances have been among the lowest of all WAFL clubs in the post-West Coast Eagles era. The so-called "dedicated" East Perth supporters of the early-1980s all quickly jumped ship at the first opportunity to support the new, artificial, corporate West Coast franchise. The concept of "loyalty" in Western Australian football since 1987 has been strained, muted, and bastardized, with some strange individuals following both West Coast *and* Fremantle in the AFL. Imagine people supporting both Manchester United and Manchester City or both the legendary Glasgow clubs Celtic and Rangers! Other West Australian football followers switched teams twice, once from their WAFL club to the West Coast Eagles in 1987 and once from the West Coast Eagles to the Fremantle Dockers in 1995.

A famous American sports fan turned commentator, Joe Benigno, wrote in his only partly tongue-in-cheek book *Rules for New York Sports*

*Fans* that the number one “rule” for supporting sports in New York City is that you cannot have more than one team per sport, i.e. you cannot support *both* the Yankees and Mets in baseball or *both* the Giants and the Jets in American football or *both* the Knicks or Nets in basketball or two or more of the Rangers, Islanders or Devils in ice-hockey.<sup>302</sup> This rule has always been modified in Australia where you were “allowed” to support one football team *per competition* in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, you could support Geelong, East Perth, and Port Adelaide or West Perth, Richmond, and Norwood (to name the three clubs that David Palm played for). This was unchanged in theory but became very confusing in practice after the West Coast Eagles joined the VFL/AFL as *it was then “permitted” for you to leave your existing VFL/AFL team to support the Eagles* which most, but by no means all, people did. Then in 1995 you were “permitted” to leave the Eagles to support the Dockers especially if you lived anywhere near the Fremantle area or if you had historic or family ties to either one of East or South Fremantle.

The Dockers, like baseball’s New York Mets in relation to the Yankees and soccer’s Melbourne City in relation to Melbourne Victory, became a team you supported if you didn’t like the Eagles as much as a team you supported for its own sake. Philosophers Marx and Engels might have called the Mets and Dockers the anti-theses of the dialectical contradiction in that they only make sense in relation to the “big brother” that they always measure themselves up against.

Many people also abandoned their WAFL team, either in practice alone *or in theory as well*, to support the Eagles or Dockers. In 1987 some formally divorced their WAFL club while for others they simply ignored their old wife whilst becoming infatuated with their glamorous new blue-and-gold girlfriend (with those sexy eagles’ wings)! This created an alarming situation where fans were not castigated for leaving their WAFL club to support an AFL club. In fact it was even regarded positively if you did so as the *West Coast Eagles was mistakenly perceived by many to be a state team rather than just another club team which just happened to be Perth-based*. Therefore, simply because the WAFL clubs and the AFL clubs were not in the same competition, it was acceptable to abandon your WAFL club in the post-West Coast Eagles

<sup>302</sup> Benigno, J. (2010), *Rules for New York Sports Fans* (Chicago: Triumph Books), pp. 1-4.

era, and I always thought this was very disappointing and wrong-headed. Can you imagine supporters abandoning Manchester City, Newcastle United or West Ham United if they slipped out of the English Premier League? In fact at present Portsmouth still attracts home crowds of around 16,000-18,000 people whilst playing in League Two (tier-four of the pyramid when viewed from the top). Furthermore, most Fremantle Dockers' supporters over the age of 30 used to be West Coast Eagles supporters making the "intensity" and "rivalry" of the early "Western Derby" played between West Coast and Fremantle ridiculous.

Tony Barker interviewed the business and football protagonists involved in the formation of the West Coast Eagles in 1986-87.<sup>303</sup> The after-the-fact rationalizations, justifications, and profound analysis are interesting although we do not get an apology from any of those suited businesspersons who bled the Eagles dry in its first two years with conspicuous consumption and bad business decisions. These poor decisions include at the very least: (a) agreeing to pay a AUD4 million licence fee to the VFL *up-front*; (b) paying excessive amounts for the aging Ross Glendinning and the injury-prone Phil Narkle; (c) showing a distinct lack of ethics by pursuing contracted players Paul Harding and Gary Buckenara; (d) hiring two coaches Alexander and Todd without VFL/AFL coaching experience; and (e) inviting "corporate people" rather than "football people" on to the board.<sup>304</sup>

Barker explores in depth the "personal politics" surrounding the births of West Coast in 1987 and Fremantle in 1995 and devotes three pages to Gerard Neesham's SWAFL.<sup>305</sup> This is one of his book's clear strong points. Barker is rightly critical of the firing of coaches Ron Alexander and John Todd by West Coast in 1987 and 1989 and the manner in which those devious and sneaky "business transactions" were conducted and rationalized.<sup>306</sup> However, in the main, Barker does not go beyond the assumption of nineteenth century scientific positivism that progress is always good, or, if not good, then at least "inevitable". Those who might scorn Marxism for alleged historical determinism all too

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<sup>303</sup> Barker, *Behind the Play*.

<sup>304</sup> For Mal Brown's opinion on the bad business and footballing decisions and the conspicuous consumption of the original Indian Pacific Limited/ West Coast Eagles' leadership see Brown and Hansen, *Mal Brown & Mongrels I've Met*, Chapter 17, pp. 185-95.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>306</sup> Yes, coaches with VFL/AFL coaching experience should have been hired but given that Alexander and Todd actually were hired they then should have been treated justly and ethically.

quickly fall back on that word “inevitable” which aims, in effect, to make people unaccountable for their own choices and actions. The term suggests that the only reasonable choice available to us is to get behind the direction in which history is marching or engage in the futile task of trying to hold back the clock. Using this logic, then, Swan Districts’ Bill Walker was and is a person “living in the past” whilst John Walker, Richard Colless, and the six pro-VFL WAFL club presidents become, for historians, virtuous (no matter what they actually did) because they were on “the side of history”.

### ***East Perth versus West Perth, Perth Oval, Round 16 (21 July) 1984***

My personal 1984 season notes state as follows about the East Perth versus West Perth match at Perth Oval on 21 July 1984:

“East Perth 19.15 d West Perth 18.17. Perth Oval. Michael [B.] lost lens at Claisebrook Station. Huge record cheer squad – talked to [West Perth coach Dennis] Cometti before the match. Timeclock wasn’t working – thrilling last quarter. Great games by [John] Gastev and [Derek] Kickett” [underlining in original].

Clearly the West Perth cheer squad had grown to its full and mature size by 21 July 1984 and, as mentioned previously, our group would swell at big away games as other West Perth fans would join us. This would include those who regularly sat in other sections of Leederville Oval (i.e. away from the cheer squad) at home games. When the cheer squad went to Perth Oval on 21 July 1984 we sat behind the southern-end goals just as we had previously done at Claremont Oval. There was no territorial invasion other than the physical entering of the ground.

The West Perth cheer squad had a large contingent that day (as my personal notes from 1984 record); the sun was lovely; and no-one disturbed the cheer squad members or insulted us. The East Perth cheer squad was behind the northern-end goals and so would not have met the West Perth cheer squad which sat at the southern-end goals after arriving from Claisebrook train station on the south-eastern side of the ground. The usual family groups of Aboriginal people that supported East Perth and sat under the trees near the back fence at the southern-end (Lord Street-end) were there that day but they gave the cheer squad



not the slightest trouble nor the cheer squad them. West Perth was a multicultural club; when your lead rover is Fong and your lead ruck-rover is Menaglio and you have a Kickett and a Davis (two Aboriginal players) on your team you would not want to entertain a racist thought even if you were that way inclined. The grassed bank behind the southern-end goals can be seen in a picture in the Claremont history book which shows action from an East Perth versus Claremont match played at the ground in the early-1970s.<sup>307</sup>

As was typical of away games, the cheer squad members were in a jovial, carnival mood all day which persisted even after West Perth suffered a narrow loss. We all went back to Claisebrook Station (where the lost contact lens incident referred to in my season notes occurred) after the match in a large group in order to journey back to Perth central train station in the city-centre. The days at Claremont and Perth Ovals were very similar: a large cheer squad group; fine weather; a carnival atmosphere among the group; and a large group claiming half a carriage on the train back into the city-centre. We were possibly fortunate not to get into trouble with opposing fans at Perth Oval. That trend would end with the cheer squad's first and probably only visit to that most parochial of WAFL grounds, Bassendean Oval, home of 1980s WAFL powerhouse the Swan Districts Football Club.

### ***Swan Districts Football Club***

Without a doubt Swan Districts was the club of the early-1980s in the WAFL, i.e. the club which had and has the privileged position of being the Golden Club of the Golden Era. After being easy-beats for most of the late-1970s, with a bottom two position nearly assured, Swans, under the expert coaching of the disciplinarian John Todd, began a rapid ascent up the premiership ladder to the extent that the club played in (but lost) the 1980 grand final against a brilliant Mal Brown coached South Fremantle team that included Basil Campbell; Brad Hardie; Stephen Michael; Joe McKay; the late Maurice Rioli; Tony Morley; and Benny Vigona. The Full Points Footy website comments as follows regarding the coaching style of John Todd:

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<sup>307</sup> Casey, *The Tigers' Tale*, p. 119.

"Whereas the best Western Australian teams have traditionally been renowned for producing highly-skilled, open, flowing football Todd tended to favour a more 'Victorian' approach. His teams were tough and determined, capable of brilliance, but more typically achieving victory by relentless running supplemented with substantial amounts of vigour. It is probably no coincidence that Todd went on to become the first coach to steer the West Coast Eagles into the finals as his style was eminently suited to the dog eat dog desperation of the [then] VFL".<sup>308</sup>

### ***Perth versus Swan Districts, Lathlain Park, Round 3 (16 April), 1979***

I was actually there at that moment in 1979 when there was a symbolic "changing of the guard" between declining Perth (1976 and 1977 premiers and 1978 grand finalists) and emergent Swans (premiers in 1982, 1983, and 1984 and 1980 grand finalists).<sup>309</sup> I was sitting high up in the visiting fans' section of the Lathlain Park grandstand with my late grandfather Herbert Arthur Acott (1906-99) and his best mate Ernie Henderson on this day in April 1979. In a tense finish, the emergent Swans held on to win by four points to symbolize the end of the Perth era and the start of the Swans' era. East et al. report that the date was Monday 16 April 1979 and the final score was: Swan Districts 11.12 (78) defeated Perth 11.8 (74).<sup>310</sup> The official attendance was 11,046. The picture on p. 166 of Dawson's book shows John Todd embracing his chairman of selectors Bob Manning at the end of this game.<sup>311</sup> Dawson writes that: "There was palpable relief in John's face on the final siren, with Swans kicking only six points in the last term as Perth fought back from a three goal deficit".<sup>312</sup>

Although never a Swans' supporter, I was nonetheless caught up in the atmosphere of the game's tight finish, and I remember running down to the visiting team players' race (which was enclosed by just a wire-chain fence on both sides and over the top) to cheer the Swans' players as they left the ground. Years later, in the 1998 WAFL season when my grandfather was 92-years-old and I was 29, I took my grandfather to a

<sup>308</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Swan\\_Districts.htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/Swan_Districts.htm) [accessed 5 January 2011].

<sup>309</sup> Similarly, Frost cites Sturt players of the era who regard their club's 16 July 1966 victory over Port Adelaide Magpies at Alberton Oval as marking the beginning of Sturt's dominance over Port in the SANFL competition. That win was also a symbolic "changing of the guard" moment which can be precisely identified at least with the benefit of hindsight. Frost, *Immortals*, p. 221.

<sup>310</sup> East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 251.

<sup>311</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, p. 166.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Perth versus East Fremantle game at Lathlain Park.<sup>313</sup> It took forever for me to help my grandfather walk up and down the main grandstand's steps. The late Mr. Acott enjoyed the game (it was be his last ever game of football watched in the flesh) and especially the speed and skill of East Fremantle, the eventual premier team of that year. East Fremantle's team included the veteran Steve Malaxos whom my grandfather still remembered from his earlier stints at Claremont and West Coast. On a sunny day, the view from the top sections of the Lathlain Park grandstand is magnificent with the tree-tops in the middle distance, the blue sky above, and the hills of the Darling Ranges as the backdrop. It is one of WAFL football's truly iconic views.

### ***Swan Districts Football Club (continued)***

Swans in the early-1980s proved to be a master team and perhaps *the* last great WAFL dynasty of the pre-West Coast Eagles era to the extent that East Fremantle and Subiaco had their runs halted midstream by the formation of West Coast and most of the better players of both teams went on to join the Eagles. The West Coast Eagles effectively fielded an East Fremantle-Subiaco combined team in 1987.

Prime movers for Swans in the early-1980s were the future Essendon premiership player Leon Baker; Jon Fogarty; Don Holmes; Barry Kimberley; Don Langsford; the Aboriginal brothers Keith and Phil Narkle; Mike and Steve Richardson; and Brad Shine. The slightly more mercurial brother Phil Narkle later played for St Kilda and West Coast (when past his prime and dogged by injuries) and returned to win another premiership with Swans and John Todd (back from his two years at West Coast) in 1990. However, Phil's elder brother Keith never played VFL/AFL. Both brothers were excellent and fair players and widely admired by all WAFL club supporters. Keith was a mainstream of the Swans' team and, like the long-serving key-position players Stan Nowotny and Tom Mullooly, had been at the club since its miserable era of the late-1970s. A by then veteran Gerard Neesham helped Swans in the midfield in the early-1980s premiership years; he was still fast as well as physically tough and mentally disciplined. Neesham probably

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<sup>313</sup> This was either the game on 4 April 1998 or the game on 8 August 1998. East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 254.

brought some of the self-confident East Fremantle winning culture over to Swans.

The Swans' 1982-84 premiership teams were perhaps not the most skilful although they were above average in this regard as well. Despite the presence of some brilliant players, it has to be said that "professional" or even "workmanlike" are adjectives that could have been used to describe many of the team's players, if not the team as a whole, in the early-1980s. John Todd gave his players mental toughness, resolve, courage, team spirit, and self-belief rivalled only perhaps in the WAFL by teams coached by Mal Brown and Gerard Neesham.<sup>314</sup>

However, I believed that West Perth had a team capable of challenging Swans in 1985 as the Bassendean-based club was fast approaching the end of its great era. Most of its better premiership-era players had already left although, ominously for West Perth as it turned out, Garry Sidebottom had returned from his stint playing in Victoria.

### ***Swan Districts versus West Perth, Bassendean Oval, 1985***

A trip to Bassendean Oval to play Swan Districts requires a long train journey from the Perth city-centre on the ancient Midland train line (opened 1 March 1881). Swan Districts is the most remote from the city-centre of the six traditional WAFL clubs which are not Fremantle-based. (Fremantle is often regarded as a separate city in its own right.) By WAFL standards Bassendean is a fairly compact ground with the outer grassy banks being less wide and less high than those at East Fremantle Oval, Leederville Oval (prior to its recent renovations) or Lathlain Park. Like a soccer ground, all spectators are relatively close to the play. The famous old stands hug the playing arena closely and cast much of it in shadow in the late afternoons.

Since the formation of West Coast Eagles in 1987, "Swans" has had a reputation, fiercely and jealously guarded, of being the epitome of a traditional WAFL club. Bill Walker of Swan Districts was one of only two WAFL club presidents to vote against the entry of West Coast Eagles into the expanded VFL (now AFL). Even the once vibrant Midland and Guildford districts, at the centre of Swan Districts' geographic heartland,

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<sup>314</sup> The classic book on the Todd era at Swan Districts is *John Todd: Six Decades of Footy* by Brian Dawson.

retain a large proportion of historic buildings and they seemed to have remained somewhat shielded from the economic, social, and demographic changes that the rest of Perth has experienced. The large Aboriginal population suggests to some a more cultural, communal, and non-materialistic way of life compared to other parts of the city. Bassendean Oval used to be a fearsome place for visiting supporters; every corner of it was claimed by some gang or other of Swans' supporters. Even today, Swans attract larger home crowds than other WAFL clubs and the compact nature of the ground makes a crowd of two to three thousand mostly Swans' supporters still a fearsome proposition for opposition fans and players.

Although there was and is a members' stand, the R.A. McDonald Stand, in the ground's south-western corner, has always contained vocal and hardcore Swan Districts' supporters of all ages. The stand still contains such dedicated supporters today, although nowadays there are empty seats during the main game. In the WAFL's Golden Era patrons had to arrive long before the start of the main game to be assured a seat in the McDonald Stand (pronounced as if it had an extra "s" as in "McDonald's Stand"). My late maternal grandfather Mr. Acott and his best mate Ernie Henderson always sat there, towards the top, in the 1970s and into the first half of the 1980s.<sup>315</sup> I also sat with them there, on three or four occasions, although never when West Perth was the opponent.

On this most memorable day, most probably in 1985, the West Perth cheer squad headed out to Bassendean Oval, from Perth city-centre on the Midland train line. I cannot recall how many people met in the city-centre beforehand. There was probably a sub-group which got on at the city-centre and the long journey then magnified our good spirits, self-confidence, and camaraderie. West Perth had been performing well on the field in 1985 and a win would certainly not have been an unlikely outcome. The cheer squad was in celebration and party mood, travelling to a distant and remote ground at the far end of the metropolitan area. Many cheer squad members would not have gone to the ground before. It was the sort of the ground then, like West Ham United's Upton Park or Portsmouth's Fratton Park in the 1970s and

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<sup>315</sup> Eunice James, personal interview with the author, 16 July 2011.

1980s, that you might avoid going to unless you had a large group and were in self-confident mood.

No part of Bassendean Oval is seemingly reserved for the away supporters (except perhaps the Bill Walker Stand which is located to the immediate right of the McDonald Stand when viewed from inside the playing arena). The McDonald Stand is only 20- or 30-metres from the southern-end goals. The northern-end goals are furthest from the train station so, logically, that was not the place for the away fans. The logic of the era was that visiting cheer squads would stay near the entrance that was closest to the train station so that meant the southern-end at Claremont Oval and the southern-end at Perth Oval. It is like when invited to someone's home you stay in the visitor's couch in the living-room and don't go to the bedrooms! Lathlain Park was and is different because the main entrance affords easy access to both goals. However, since Nick's Perth FC cheer squad had claimed the northern- or city-end goals at Lathlain Park, away team cheer squads in the mid-1980s would sit at the southern-end goals out of respect. I argue that, although fraternal camaraderie was the norm among cheer squads throughout Australia, based on the Victorian model, there was still an "illusion of violence" since, if the rules of protocol or politeness were not followed by everyone, the mood could turn ugly and many cheer squad members were from working-class or lumpenproletariat backgrounds.

I can recall our West Perth group this day entering what were then the most popular gates of the oval, in the south-west corner closest to Success Hill train station, with the giant flags. In the environment of Bassendean Oval, these flags stood out like a sore thumb. Swans' fans then had a dour and austere culture where you would not wear club colours. Anything slightly showy was frowned upon as not befitting this working-class district far removed from the city-centre. Furthermore, Swans' colours are black-and-white; the cheer squad's red-and-blue jerseys and flags stood out like the first year of colour television. People probably thought that we were show-offs and smart-arses. We took the path of least resistance and set ourselves up behind the southern-end goals. The group's flags and banners were right there in front of the line of sight of the McDonald Stand's inhabitants around 25-metres away. The heritage-protected ground is largely unchanged today. One picture in this book shows the McDonald Stand as viewed from the southern-

end goals while another picture shows the opposite view (the southern-end goals as viewed from the McDonald Stand) (date of pictures: 12 July 2011).

The cheer squad was chanting its usual chants that day but with perhaps unusual venom. There had been animosity between West Perth supporters and Swan Districts' coach John Todd since Todd left West Perth's Brian Adamson out of a Western Australian combined state team in 1975.<sup>316</sup> This animosity had then followed Todd across from East Fremantle to Swan Districts.<sup>317</sup> Dawson writes as follows about the relationship between Swans and West Perth during the 1980s: "The feud was always publicly denied, but continued into the 1980s and all Swans-West Perth games were well-attended with many fiery incidents, off and on the field".<sup>318</sup> Swans' record home ground attendance remains today the 22,350 people who watched Swans play West Perth on 10 May 1980 (Round 6).<sup>319</sup>

It may have been the "Ronnie Boucher walks on water / everybody knows that bullshit floats" chant that made the Swan Districts' fans increasingly upset on this particular day in 1985. (Ronnie Boucher was Swan Districts' strong aggressive ruckman of the era.) Swan Districts had no recognized or organized cheer squad then but generally cheer squads accept each other's chants as just part of the job description and not to be taken seriously. I doubt very much whether the West Perth cheer squad would have been offended by, for example, the Perth cheer squad's chants. Much more dangerous than opposing cheer squads are the disorganized fans. The McDonald Stand was an intimidating place in that era and our cheer squad was insulting Swans' players and showing off its vibrant red-and-blue colours directly in front of their noses. The cheer squad also had its famous song, sung to the tune of the classic children's song "Old McDonald had a Farm": "Old McDonald had a stand/ eyie eyie oh / and in that stand was full of pigs / eyie eyie oh". Of course the cheer squad members all thought this song was very funny and we sang it repeatedly and at maximum volume. It may have been inherited from Fat Pam's cheer squad. If not then I do not know who actually coined it.

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<sup>316</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, pp. 148, 150.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>319</sup> East, *75 Years*, pp. 23 and 212.

Around three-quarter time during the main game, we saw that a group of around eight Aboriginal youths, around the group members' ages or slightly older, had very quietly surrounded us and taken up strategic seating positions just outside the group on all three sides. This Aboriginal group began to make intimidating comments including that they would beat our group members up after the game. The Aboriginal group members wore no club colours but they were very clearly Swans' supporters. They must have been offended by the West Perth flags and chanting. Our West Perth cheer squad watched the game much more diligently and stopped playing up to and taunting the inhabitants of the McDonald Stand. I could tell that our group members were apprehensive. Aboriginal gang culture and the culture of the suburbs around Bassendean Oval were not well known to any of the group. None of us had any reputation in the area that we could call upon whereas people like Thommo, Courtney, and Robbie were widely known and liked in large swathes of the northern suburbs and P.A. was the King of Balga. It was the classic away fans scenario.

We all began to watch the game much more diligently and talk among ourselves; we adopted a much lower profile. We became just normal fans rather than a cheer squad as such. Even the noisiest members became quiet which was very remarkable. People became grossly absorbed in the match, looked straight ahead, and quietly conversed in their twos and threes. This was partly a strategic act and partly a sub-conscious switch to the self-preservation mode. The chanting mostly stopped although I am sure that we still waved the flags after West Perth goals. One had to literally fly the flag. If we want some theorization of the cheer squad's behaviour self-modification, we might cite Peter Marsh who writes in *Aggro: the Illusion of Violence* that:

"[w]e can instantly recognize dominant or submissive stances in other people and we frequently employ them ourselves ... Adopting a submissive posture is the clearest way in which ... a person ... can signal that he has had enough and thus avoid serious injury".<sup>320</sup>

When the game ended, or possibly five or ten minutes prior to that, the West Perth cheer squad looked around and they saw that the Aboriginal group had disappeared. I do not think that anyone even saw or heard

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<sup>320</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, pp. 19 and 41.



them leave. Our West Perth group had passed some kind of test. Possibly the Swan Districts' group had decided that we were "good guys at heart" or possibly they had just lost interest in confrontation or had somewhere to go straight after the match. Swans' on-field victory that day might possibly have been seen by the Aboriginal group as having been vindication enough for them (as Mike B. today claims<sup>321</sup>).

Like the London Teddy Boys who menacingly surrounded Desmond Morris and his wife in a Camden Town cafe in 1957 but then paid the couple's bill and left with a friendly greeting<sup>322</sup>, the Swan Districts group had reinforced territorial dominance by Swans' fans over Bassendean Oval, including the seats behind the southern-end goals, without resorting to actual violence. Marsh explains further as follows: "When men enter into aggressive confrontations with each other, the object of the exercise is not killing but preservation of dominance relations, the defence of particular space or access to basic resources".<sup>323</sup>

The Swan Districts versus West Perth match was probably either the 19.14 (128) to 15.12 (102) Swans' victory on 8 April 1985 (attendance 10,500) or the 22.12 (144) to 21.16 (142) Swans' victory on 20 July 1985 (attendance 9,462).<sup>324</sup> It was probably the first one of these as I remember that interest and atmosphere had drained out of the match prior to the last 10 or 15 minutes. One interesting fact is that West Perth defeated Swans five times out of nine during Swans' premiership years of 1982-84.<sup>325</sup> By contrast, in 1985, when Swans were not among the top two teams and West Perth made the finals series, Swans defeated West Perth three times out of three in the regular season games and one more time in the first semi-final.<sup>326</sup> It is certainly hard to explain this. Such are the vagaries of football.

This event at Bassendean Oval's southern-end goals was a near-miss for the West Perth cheer squad and the group members probably learned a lesson to be somewhat less cocky, more respectful, and more circumspect in hostile away territory. It must be pointed out that the cheer squad members never viewed this encounter as any sort of "racial war" – our group was multicultural and had a multicultural ethos. For

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<sup>321</sup> Personal interview, 14 July 2011.

<sup>322</sup> Morris, D (1978), "Foreword", in Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 7.

<sup>323</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 125.

<sup>324</sup> The match scores are taken from Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, pp. 334, 335.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 333, 334.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 334 and 335.

example, D.S. from Tuart Hill was an ethnic Chinese and the brothers Tony and Mario were of Italian ethnicity. In fact West Perth supporters have long been referred to by the racist tag of “Garlic Munchers” (especially by East Perth fans). This tag emerged because of the large southern-European support base which was attracted to the club in the immediate post-World War II period.

### ***West Perth versus Swan Districts, Leederville Oval, Round 14 (7 July) 1984***

On another occasion, this time at Leederville Oval in 1984, the West Perth cheer squad incurred the wrath of Swan Districts’ ruckman Ron Boucher. No opposition player ever reacted to the cheer squad or responded to it, other than Boucher, in those years from 1984-86. The West Perth cheer squad felt that Boucher was an unpleasant character. He was out-of-place in the great Swans’ teams of the early-1980s as he resembled a country footballer from thirty years previously. The Full Points Footy website writes about Ron Boucher as follows although other sources<sup>327</sup> confirm that Boucher did play on into the 1984 season although he missed the losing grand final side:

“Recruited from North Albany, Ron Boucher made his league debut with Swan Districts in 1971. Extremely powerfully built at 192cm and 102kg, he used his strength to awesome effect, most notably during Swans’ halcyon period under John Todd in the early 1980s. He was one of his team’s best in the losing grand final against South Fremantle in 1980, and was a key contributor to premiership wins in 1982-3, despite having to battle for much of the time with persistent niggling injuries. He was equally effective as a knock ruckman or a strong marking forward, and was selected in a forward pocket in Swan Districts’ official ‘Team of the Century’.

Ron Boucher played 190 games for Swan Districts between 1971 and 1983 [sic], as well as representing Western Australia. He won the club’s fairest and best award in his penultimate season”.<sup>328</sup>

The West Perth cheer squad had a reverse (uncomplimentary) version of its “walks on water” chant reserved for opposition players as follows: “Ronnie Boucher walks on water / everybody knows that bullshit floats”. P.A., Mike C., Pete C., and Thommo especially thought that this chant

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<sup>327</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, p. 158, fn. 46, p. 207.

<sup>328</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/bi-bz.htm#Ron Boucher \(Swan Districts\)](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/bi-bz.htm#Ron+Boucher+(Swan+Districts)) [accessed 7 January 2011].

was just hilarious. There was also an alternative, negative chant variant “Ronnie Boucher woo-hoo” and at the last syllable people would raise their right arms to around face height and then move their open right hands in downwards motion in front of their raised, stiff wrists. I am certain that readers will be aware of the particular hand gesture which is being referred to here. As an ex-West Perth player and one the club should really have held on to the late Chris Stasinowsky also received this treatment from the cheer squad when he played for Perth in 1985 and 1986.

Mike B. recounted to me one 1984 Leederville Oval incident involving Boucher which had failed to rise to the top of my memory and which had not appeared in the first draft of this book. This is a fiery incident relating to West Perth versus Swans matches in the 1980s which has not previously been made public. According to Mike B.<sup>329</sup>, on this day at Leederville, Boucher became upset by our cheer squad’s chants and he walked up to where Mike B. and I were seated, leaned forward over the boundary fence, grabbed Mike B. by his West Perth replica jersey, and demanded to know: “What did you f\*\*\*ing say?” In deep shock, Mike B. managed to stammer: “I’m really sorry, Mr. Boucher”. In an interesting postscript to this story, Mike B.<sup>330</sup> mentioned that years after this Leederville Oval incident he contested an arm-wrestling bout against Boucher in Broome which was the town where Boucher was then living. To no-one’s surprise Boucher ultimately beat all other contestants and won the contest.

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<sup>329</sup> Personal interview, 14 July 2011.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

## **South Fremantle Football Club**

There is one last chant of our West Perth cheer squad which I have not discussed. This chant is probably the most controversial used by the cheer squad and so it should be left to last. If you ask me now which actions, if any, I regret I would answer “this chant in particular”. As mentioned, South Fremantle had a contingent of brilliant Aboriginal players in the early-1980s and West Perth had two great Aboriginal players in Derek Kickett and Ron Davis. Another Aboriginal player with great talent and flair was half-forward Lindsay Henry who played five games for West Perth in the 1988 season. One of South Fremantle’s greats was wingman Benny Vigona, a member of the 1980 premiership side and the 1979 and 1981 losing grand final teams. Vigona polled seven votes in the 1984 Sandover Medal Count, half as many as scored by the equal fourth-place getters Laurie Keene (Subiaco) and Peter Menaglio (West Perth).<sup>331</sup> The Full Points Footy website writes as follows about the great Benny Vigona:

“After commencing his senior career with St Marys, where he won back to back best and fairest awards, Benny Vigona moved to South Fremantle in 1977 and rapidly developed into one of the WANFL competition’s most exciting talents. Initially used mainly either on a wing or at half forward, he boasted sublime ball skills, explosive pace, and a penchant for the spectacular. Later in his career he was shifted to a half back flank with considerable success, reinforcing his undoubted ability with a newfound consistency in the process. In a decade with South, Vigona amassed close to 200 league games and represented Western Australia on 4 occasions”.<sup>332</sup>

The West Perth cheer squad had a chant of “Benny’s got a Vigona!” Obviously the chant was only used at games against South Fremantle. I do not know the origin of this chant but everyone thought that it was funny. It *may* have come from Fat Pam’s cheer squad, Grandstand Falcons or some other group of West Perth support. Fortunately, there is little chance that Benny himself heard the chant as he was a midfielder and the cheer squad always sat behind the goals. Marsh provides some theoretical commentary regarding the need to “feminize” one’s opponents as a part of “aggro” and “the illusion of violence”:

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<sup>331</sup> Christian, G. (1984), “Three-way tie for the Sandover”, *The West Australian*, 29 August, p. 127.

<sup>332</sup> Full Points Footy website, [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/t-u-v.htm#Benny Vigona](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/t-u-v.htm#Benny_Vigona) (St Marys & South Fremantle) [accessed 7 January 2011].

“The examination of the football [hooligan] aggro phenomenon revealed a very important process. It showed that in the context of the striving for manly dominance a highly strategic weapon was the system of insults which served to demasculinize one's rivals. Making them appear homosexual or, better still, feminine was part and parcel of this particular manifestation of aggro”.<sup>333</sup>

Was this a racist chant? It certainly represents a deliberate attempt to “feminize” a rival star Aboriginal player. The chant opportunistically takes advantage of a surname that obviously can be used quite easily as the principal ingredient for toilet humour. I do not personally think that it was a racist chant as if a white footballer had happened to have had a similar sounding surname then the chant would still have been used. Although this is subjective I can recall no animosity around the use of the chant in terms of tone or accompanying chit-chat – the chant was just a form of comic relief. There was much more venom involved in chants about Swan Districts and that club's players such as Ronnie Boucher. South Fremantle was not a major rival of West Perth in the 1980s. Nonetheless, it is a chant that I definitely regret. Aboriginal players do not need to bear any additional burdens or stresses whilst on the playing field. It is easy to excuse the chant by saying that these were less politically correct times but, then again, I have already discussed my dislike of the unambiguously racist “Garlic Munchers” tag as applied to West Perth supporters by East Perth fans.

Interestingly, Atkinson documents that, in February 2004, a group of West Perth members began calling themselves the “Garlic Munchers” to differentiate themselves from other members in terms of their views about the adoption of “Joondalup Falcons” as the club's trading name.<sup>334</sup> This is a similar situation to those Greek-Australians who voluntarily adopted the “wog” tag in the popular early-1990s stage-show *Wogs Out of Work* (created by Nick Giannopoulos and Simon Palomares) or those African-Americans who have voluntarily used the word “nigger” in relation to themselves. This behaviour can be seen as altering power relations by turning the abusive word into a term of endearment or even empowerment when used by a certain group of people in certain ways and at certain times *of their own choosing*. It is a very political act as it takes over the discursive space and provides new opportunities for the

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<sup>333</sup> Marsh, *Aggro*, p. 114.

<sup>334</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 254.

fight against racism whilst also being used to further group cohesion and self-identity. The barrier between “insiders” and “outsiders” is retained but it is now turned into something positive and powerful from the viewpoint of the group using the stigmatized name.

***First semi-final 1985 – West Perth versus Swan Districts, Subiaco Oval, 31 August***

West Perth earned a rematch against Swan Districts in the 1985 first semi-final played on 31 August 1985 at Subiaco Oval. In those days there was a grassed northern bank at the city-end and there was concrete terracing all along the Roberts Road or eastern side of the ground. These were the general admission ticket areas back then. In that era, for every final apart from the grand final, there was no need to pre-book tickets at Subiaco Oval unless you wanted grandstand seating. In those days semi-finals would attract between 20,000 and 35,000 people and the oval itself could accommodate close to 50,000. Nowadays grand finals struggle to attract even the type of crowds that semi-finals attracted in the WAFL's Golden Era.

In the newspapers leading up to the game the media columnists were split fairly evenly in terms of which team they thought would win the game. Swan Districts' Garry Sidebottom was widely and correctly perceived to be the wild-card who, on a good day, could single-handedly destroy West Perth up forward<sup>335</sup> which is exactly what happened. West Perth also suffered from Menaglio being out injured<sup>336</sup>; Duckworth not having recovered from an absence caused by the after-effects of swallowing a fish bone<sup>337</sup>; and, although Comerford, Fong, and Michalczyk did play, they were well below their bests as a result of carrying niggling injuries into the game from the qualifying rounds<sup>338</sup>. Swans' tough centreman Tony Solin had also been expected to miss the game on the Monday of the lead-up week<sup>339</sup> but he returned to play a very strong game. Rogers and the veteran Murnane missed the last qualifying game versus a lacklustre Claremont, but Murnane was

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<sup>335</sup> Christian, G. (1985a), “Swans prepare for an early blitz”, *The West Australian*, 30 August, pp. 191-2; Stocks, G. (1985b), “A driving force ...”, *The West Australian*, 31 August, p. 192.

<sup>336</sup> Christian, “Swans prepare for an early blitz”.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

expected to return for the semi-final and be able to slot in well to replace the injured Menaglio.<sup>340</sup> As it turned out Murnane did play but he was not listed in any commentator's best-players list. Meanwhile, Rogers' match statistics of one mark, zero kicks, and two effective handballs suggest that he was still incapacitated.

On first semi-final day, 1985, Mike B. and I took an early morning bus from Booragoon to the city-centre and then the train to West Leederville station. The West Perth cheer squad had arranged to meet at the Subiaco Road entrance gates, in the north-east corner of the ground, rather than at the more crowded Roberts Road gates in the south-east corner. Group members had planned beforehand to get tickets on the day and to be first in the gates when they opened which must have been fixed at about 8am or 9am. The cheer squad members needed to be early to claim a seat immediately behind the fence on the two rows of wooden seats in front of the grassed bank. Mike C. and Pete C. were ahead of Mike B. and me in line when we arrived. Mike and Pete were carrying their red-and-blue flags and wearing their long-sleeve West Perth replica jerseys. I can't recall if they already had their tickets and were waiting for Mike B. and me outside the line or whether they were simply there already ahead of us in the queue. We all obtained our general admission tickets quickly and we (others may have been there too by then) were near the front of the waiting crowd when the gates opened.

The general admission tickets entitled you access to the grassed northern bank and to the concrete terracing but not to the grandstands. As was the practice in that era, our cheer squad members sprinted up and then down the grassed bank when the gates opened and claimed a section of seats directly behind the fence, sufficient to accommodate the core 15 people we were expecting for the game. The early arrivals claimed around eight spots on each of the first two wooden seat rows as had been agreed by everyone the week before at the final home-and-away game. The cheer squad sat in the north-east corner of the ground, directly behind the fence, in around the same place as Perth supporters placed a "Chris Mitsopoulos" fence banner during the 1977 grand final.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> See the 1977 WAFL grand final DVD which is available from the Perth Football Club main office or at the merchandise store at Lathlain Park on match days.

Cheer squad members settled down to a long day of watching the early colts and reserves games which, coincidentally, all involved West Perth. The regular core group members all arrived, one by one and in twos and threes, and were offered seats in the group's new "reserved" section. The crowd in the grassed banked area built up steadily throughout the day. By starting time for the main game most people seated on the grassed bank had given way to people standing up. In that era the bars and the food stands were located right at the top of the grassed bank at the city-end. No group member drank beer at games which, in hindsight, is somewhat surprising as several people were 18-years-old by August 1985 (see Appendix A).

Cheer squad members planned to enjoy the day; again there was a carnival atmosphere, but the group had been metaphorically sobered up by the recent encounter with the Swan Districts' fans at Bassendean Oval so people were careful to avoid trouble. It was always uncertain which team the bulk of the crowd nearest you would support at finals games and, if you arrived at the ground very early, you might later find yourself surrounded by opposition supporters. Therefore, it was wiser to restrain your behaviour before the start of the main game.

We had all had previous experiences of West Perth losing final round matches. The team had entered the final four, but not made the grand final, in 1976, 1977, and 1978, and again in 1982 in Dennis Cometti's first year of coaching. Group members were mostly too young to have properly experienced the 1975 premiership win; on this day in 1985 the core group, excluding Ben, Rob, Tony, Half, Mario, and Thommo Junior, ranged in age from 15 to 19 so in 1975 this core group would have been aged from five to nine. Group members had learned not to have high hopes of West Perth come finals' time. To be honest people all expected a loss but we would have loved a win. In the end West Perth was duly defeated by Swan Districts in the first semi-final of 1985, 24.14 (158) to 19.12 (126) in front of an official attendance of 26,508 people.<sup>342</sup> The team had not been humiliated but I do remember clearly that the result was never in serious doubt this day. The result did not surprise the cheer squad members as all of us were West Perth fans of the drought era (to use Brian Atkinson's term)!

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<sup>342</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 335.



Garry Sidebottom was unbeatable with his nine goals, the equal record highest score by any footballer in a WAFL final round match. Dawson writes that: “[Swans’ rover Barry] Kimberley played the kick behind the play role to perfection when West Perth had the breeze, ensuring Swans path to the preliminary final”<sup>343</sup>. West Perth’s losing score of 19 goals was commendable and, according to Atkinson, on most days would have been good enough to win the game.<sup>344</sup>

A look at the scoring records suggest that West Perth in 1985 suffered from the lack of a regular full-forward with the club’s on-ball and half-forward-line running players bobbing up to kick much of the team’s scores. Mark Stephens (27 games, 1982, 1984-86<sup>345</sup>) was named in *The West Australian* newspaper to play full-forward in the first semi-final but he kicked no goals or points and may not even have played. Top scorers for the day for West Perth were centre-half-forward Phil Bradmore with 4.1 and Derek Kickett with 4.1. Running players were the only other West Perth men to kick more than one goal with the remaining multiple goal scorers being Darren Bewick 3.1, Corry Bewick 2.2, Les Fong 2.2, and Peter Murnane 2.0. Incredibly no recognized full-forward was recruited by West Perth for the 1986 season and West Perth fans had to endure the ignominy of watching West Perth reject Mick Rea perform splendidly for Perth in both 1985 and 1986 playing as a conventional lead-mark-kick full-forward. On first semi-final day 1985, the presence of full-forward Sidebottom and Swans’ mental toughness honed by years of successful finals’ campaigns were clearly the two main differences between the teams.

In the end, Swan Districts failed to progress further beyond the preliminary final in 1985, and Ron Alexander’s East Fremantle defeated Haydn Bunton Junior’s Subiaco by a mere five points in the grand final. I watched the grand final not with the cheer squad but with my father and grandfather seated in the middle-tier of the three-tier grandstand at the western-end of Subiaco Oval (following a family tradition rather than a cheer squad tradition this time around). I can remember walking back to our car after the game, heading back into Subiaco proper, and we stopped a few times to let my grandfather take short rests sitting on little brick walls and similar. After West Perth had been eliminated, we all

<sup>343</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, p. 221.

<sup>344</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal interview, 8 July 2011.

<sup>345</sup> Atkinson, *It’s a Grand Old Flag*, p. 375.

understood that the cheer squad's duties and commitments were over for the year.

### ***West Perth Football Club (continued)***

Ironically, to pour salt into the wounds, West Perth defeated eventual premiers East Fremantle two out of three times in the 1985 home-and-away rounds. None of the cheer squad members would have regarded East Fremantle as clear favourites had West Perth gone on to encounter the Sharks in the 1985 grand final. West Perth probably had the Moss Street-based club's measure. Football is made up of vagaries, trivia, and ironies such as this. In fact, from 1976-86, the pre-West Coast Eagles part of the drought era, West Perth generally had a strong record against the eventual premiers. Most West Perth supporters believed that the team could beat anyone on its day, throughout the drought era, with the possible exception of the 1979 season. However, from 1976 through to 1985, West Perth was always choked or outplayed or outmuscled in those final round matches it did manage to play in. It might have been a nerves problem and /or a matter of self-belief. West Perth was up against highly professional and disciplined teams coached by legendary and expert WAFL coaches including Ken Armstrong (Perth); Mal Brown (South Fremantle and Perth); Haydn Bunton Junior (Subiaco); and John Todd (Swan Districts).

Those hardcore West Perth supporters of the drought era were not foolish enough to fail to see a pattern at work. The team clearly ran on enthusiasm, confidence, emotion, and passion during those years. Whereas most other clubs started slowly under a new coach only to reach first the finals, then to lose a grand final, and then finally to win one, West Perth peaked in the first year of a new coach and then the trend was downhill until the next new coach was brought in! As examples of the normal course of events at other clubs, Perth lost in 1974 but won in 1976 and 1977; East Perth lost in 1976 but won in 1978; South Fremantle lost in 1979 but won in 1980; Swans lost in 1980 only to win in 1982, 1983, and 1984; East Fremantle lost in 1977 but won in 1979 and later lost in 1984 but won in 1985; whilst Subiaco lost in 1985 but won in 1986. Later on VFL/AFL club West Coast, famously, lost in 1991 but won in 1992 and 1994. The principle even applied to

pre-drought West Perth when it lost in 1973 but won in 1975. It was certainly true, in that era, that “you had to lose a grand final before you could win one” and this adage became wise advice in Western Australia not only for football but for life in general. Dawson also, referencing this period in WAFL history, refers to what he terms “an old football adage”, i.e. “you must lose one to understand what is needed to win one”.<sup>346</sup>

However, departing from the normal pattern at the other WAFL clubs, West Perth won in 1975 in Graham Campbell’s first year; reached the finals in 1982 in Dennis Cometti’s first year; and reached the finals again in John Wynne’s first year in 1985. However, West Perth failed to make the finals in Cometti’s second and third years (1983 and 1984); and again in Wynne’s second year (1986). Even in the immediate post-West Coast era the club made the finals under George Michalczyk in his first season in 1989 only to be wooden-spooners for his next two seasons.<sup>347</sup> The theory that this constituted a unique West Perth pattern was a fairly convincing one although, in all of the years, there were a host of other factors that no doubt could also be used to explain the various rises and falls. It seems that the West Perth playing group became enthusiastic under a new coach but then became bored and lackadaisical by the coach’s second year. It didn’t seem to be a very mature response to the outside observer.

### ***Perth Football Club’s cheer squad***

The Perth FC cheer squad, operating under the capable hands of the suave “metrosexual” Nick, was the leading cheer squad among the WAFL clubs in 1984 and 1985. My personal 1984 season notes, compiled during 1984, state: “Humbled by Perth cheer squad” at the West Perth versus Perth match at Leederville Oval on 14 July 1984. Being “humbled” here must refer to the respective size of the two groups and the respective numbers of flags, floggers, and banners both groups had on display. There was a combined Perth-Claremont cheer squad which represented WA at the 17 July State of Origin match versus Victoria so clearly these were the two leading cheer squads in 1984. It was at the Lathlain Park social club rooms that all the cheer squads met

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<sup>346</sup> Dawson, *John Todd*, p. 183.

<sup>347</sup> Brian Atkinson, personal interview, 8 July 2011.

one night (probably in 1984) to discuss the making of the banner for the upcoming state game. I do not recall how the West Perth cheer squad contributed to the making of the banner but our members all appreciated the warm and fraternal atmosphere generated by the host club and the host club's cheer squad. I am very sure that Nick had had some prior experience with a Victorian cheer squad as he had a clear understanding of how a cheer squad should be organized and cheer squad ethics. For Lathlain Park home games in 1984 and 1985 they always had a large and fine-looking group of people with flags, banners, and floggers congregated behind the northern- or city-end goals. Even today there is a visual reminder of this cheer squad at Lathlain Park - the wooden seats behind the city-end goals are still painted red-and-black in memory of the years in which Nick's cheer squad occupied those benches.

### ***Perth versus West Perth, Lathlain Park, Round 1 (29 March), 1986***

I can recall only one game the West Perth cheer squad attended at Lathlain Park, the first game of the 1986 season. The game was played on the Saturday of the opening split round on 29 March 1986 and West Perth drew Perth with both sides scoring 13.15 (93).<sup>348</sup> Although Perth started very strongly and led for most of the match West Perth opened up a seven point lead in the last quarter until Perth hit back to secure the draw.<sup>349</sup> The match was played on the same day as only one other game, a replay of the 1985 grand final between East Fremantle and Subiaco (won this time by Subiaco 18.9 (117) to 12.11 (83))<sup>350</sup>. The official attendance at Lathlain Park for the Perth versus West Perth match is recorded as 8,121 fans.<sup>351</sup> Already by 1986 WAFL crowds had begun to trend slowly downwards. In the late-1970s or early-1980s, on a fine Saturday such as this one, the opening day of a split round and the opening day of the season, you would have expected the crowd to be above the 10,000 mark or even above 12,000.

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<sup>348</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 335; East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 252.

<sup>349</sup> Stocks, G. (1986), "Smith gives Demons more grit", *The West Australian*, Monday, 31 March, p. 68.

<sup>350</sup> *The West Australian*, Monday, 31 March 1986, p. 68.

<sup>351</sup> The official attendance is taken from the WAFL Online website.

I recall that the West Perth cheer squad had a very large group present; and we sat behind the southern-end goals with Perth's cheer squad congregated behind the northern- or city-end goals. A picture in this book (taken 2 July 2011) shows the area behind the southern-end goals in modern times but before the redevelopment of the ground commencing in 2016. The West Perth cheer squad probably didn't meet the Perth cheer squad on this day in 1986 as the main entrance gates at Lathlain Park were positioned only around 30-metres to the north of the main grandstand, on the western side of the oval, and you could reach the southern-end goals by walking through the undercover passageway located underneath the grandstand. This day in 1986 was a very hot day, as you might expect from March in Perth, and people had their long-sleeved replica West Perth jerseys tied around their waists. Everyone was wearing tee-shirts but most people still wore the obligatory tight black or blue jeans rather than shorts. The cheer squad members were all classic 1980s Bogans except for Mike B, Courtney, and Rohan H., our football "casuals". P.A., for one, was never seen in shorts, which is probably something to be thankful for. D.S. and the C. brothers also never wore shorts and the same also applied for Thommo and me.

The cheer squad members were all happy to see each other again after a long summer without contact. It was as if everyone had put in a major mental effort to keep the cheer squad alive in some part of their minds, conscious and subconscious, over the summer. The cheer squad was the kind of organization which could survive only based on collective memories and collective willpower because there was nothing else holding it together. The cheer squad had no official name or headquarters or leaders or business cards or stationery or telephone number.

No-one very much minded that this game was a draw. Although Perth had not been a powerhouse, up until that point in the 1980s, Mal Brown was now in his second year at the helm as coach of Perth<sup>352</sup> and people naturally expected that he would continue to inject discipline, purpose, and soul into the team as he had done previously at South Fremantle. The cheer squad members hoped that West Perth could continue on in 1986 in the same style as in 1985 and secure at least a

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<sup>352</sup> East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 207.

final-four position. However, we were drought era West Perth youth and I do not think that anyone really expected a premiership! East Fremantle and Subiaco were both expected to be strong teams again in 1986. However, to balance this, it did appear to be the end of a great era at Bassendean Oval as most of Swans' premiership era stars had moved on or had retired. John Todd was effectively back where he had started at Swans ten years previously although people's continued confidence in his ability to work miracles with a depleted squad had never been higher.

I can remember the cheer squad members staying out on the playing field at Lathlain Park until dark or near-dark kicking footballs around among the cheer squad group. All or nearly all of the core members of the group were there this day at Lathlain Park in March 1986 with the possible exception of Mike B., who may not have rejoined the group at all that year. By 1986 I was no longer meeting Mike daily at high-school. After the cheer squad members had exhausted all the possibilities of kick-to-kick, we walked together as a gang back to the Victoria Park train station. On this March day in 1986 everyone had to travel north-west on the Armadale train line back to the city-centre and then most people would transfer to their various buses to take them back to the northern suburbs. The Clarkson train-line to the northern suburbs was still some years away from being built.

I can recall that it was already dark by the time the group members reached the train station. It must have been as late as 7.30pm or 8pm as 29 March is closer to summer proper than to winter proper. I then decided, on the spur of the moment, not to cross over to the western side of the track to catch the city-bound train. Instead I stayed with the much smaller group of people waiting to take the train in the south-easterly direction towards Armadale. I remember talking with some Aboriginal boys at the Victoria Park station and telling them that I lived near Applecross and knew "Raymond D." who was the only recognizable Aboriginal person at high-school and who was a good friend of my mate Roy G. In fact I had probably only ever talked to Raymond once meaning that I was a "namedropper" which you really had to be at high-school to survive. I had left high-school and was at university by this time. The Aboriginal boys welcomed the name, or maybe just my friendliness. There was a good atmosphere there. I waved and shouted across the track to the other West Perth cheer squad members on the

other side before people's respective trains took them away into the darkness.

I decided that I would visit my grandparents who lived within walking distance of the Beckenham station further down the track on the Armadale line. This was a totally spur of the moment decision. They were both very surprised to see me standing on the front porch in the semi-darkness carrying my rolled-up West Perth flag. Years later, after they had both passed away, I lived in that house for two years (October 2002 – January 2004) before moving to New South Wales for work.

I have mentioned elsewhere that this Lathlain Park match was the last time the West Perth cheer squad existed in recognizable form. It was like the saying that it is always darkest before the dawn. It was as if the collective mental and emotional effort involved in keeping the group together *psychologically*, or in other words in people's head space, over the summer months had simply been too exhausting. Once the key people stopped expending this mental effort the group just ceased to exist. It was quite remarkable or even magical.

I can only recall one subsequent 1986 game at Leederville Oval. The cheer squad may have kept the flags and floggers in action for a few more home games but I personally regard the Round 1 Lathlain Park match as being the last game for the cheer squad. In what was a remarkable outcome, the cheer squad's first game together was a drawn match (5 May 1984) and its last game together (29 March 1986), nearly two calendar years later, was also a drawn match. No-one made a deliberate decision to end the group as far as I can recall. I had become a dedicated student after entering university and I may simply have stopped putting in maximum effort to keeping the group going. Mike B. was probably in the same position in 1986 in terms of his mind drifting elsewhere. I can't even remember if Mike B. was at the Lathlain Park game. He may never have returned to the group in 1986. Mike B. and I no longer saw each other daily at high school in 1986 as had been the case in 1984 and 1985. Without Mike the cheer squad would have been like the Clash in 1984-85 without Mick Jones (with just Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon remaining)!

I do recall sitting with my good mate Thommo behind the goals one day at Leederville Oval a few weeks after the Round 1 Perth match. I do not recall whether the cheer squad actually existed at this point. I think it

probably did but in a smaller and less organized form. Thommo told me that he had left school and was doing a plastering subcontract job at the Parmelia Hotel. He would have been 16 by this time while I was 17 (see Appendix A). West Perth's declining performances in 1986 and the shadow of Western Australia's entry into the national competition dampened people's enthusiasm for the WAFL throughout 1986 and this affected people's moods certainly. It could be said that 1985 was the last year of the WAFL's Golden Era as by 1986 West Coast Eagles existed as a shadow in people's minds although not yet as an actual club with a name, jersey, and players (not until after the 1986 season had concluded).



***South Fremantle versus West Perth, Fremantle Oval, Round 19 (9 August), 1986***

I once talked to Pete C. and spent the game with him on the scoreboard bank's concrete terracing at Fremantle Oval (at around the half-forward flank position closest to the northern-end goals) for a match against South Fremantle late in the 1986 season. The flags had vanished and there was only the two of us left at this juncture in time. Pete C. and I hadn't even arranged in advance to meet; it was a chance meeting. I would have to say that the cheer squad no longer existed at this point. However, Pete's charming, quiet, and thoughtful manner had not changed.

After the game Pete C. and I walked through the Fremantle city streets together and I think Pete took a Number 106 bus or a train back to Perth while I took a different bus to Booragoon. We probably parted at Fremantle train station. I originally wrote this paragraph 26 years later, on 9 January 2013, and I still haven't seen Pete again since that day at Fremantle Oval near to the close of the 1986 season. As we walked through the Fremantle city streets together, as the dark and the chill started drifting in from the ocean (minimum temperatures were 4.5 and 4.0 degrees Celsius on Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th August 1986), we were both fairly subdued and disappointed as it looked like our team's season was over (the team probably could not make the final-four) and all the hope of the past two years had come to nothing. I think that another reason for my anxious and melancholic mood was the realization, pushed to the back of my mind, that my life was changing and it would never be the same again. I was 17-years-old, in the first year of university, and the adult world of responsibilities, choices, careers, and consequences was fast closing in, whilst childhood was at an end. In football terms, there was also massive change at work behind the scenes as the powerbrokers were putting together and planning for the new as yet unnamed super-team which would play in the VFL in 1987. Every genuine football person in Perth knew that the WAFL would never be the same again no matter how upbeat the newspapers were. Like my childhood, the old WAFL was slipping away. The days of 14,000 plus crowds at the match-of-the-round were never coming back.

### ***Concluding comments***

The story of the West Perth cheer squad of 1984-86 draws to a close here. I will only add that I once saw the back of Mike C.'s head in the front section of a Number 103 bus which was heading from Perth to Fremantle later in 1986 (or possibly in 1987 or 1988) but I never had the chance to go and talk with him. I had got on the bus in Perth city-centre and had to exit at Nedlands to go to a lecture class at the University of Western Australia. I sometimes wish that I had stayed on the bus and gone to talk to Mike but I was the victim of a mind switched on only to daily routine and obligation. This encounter seemed somewhat symbolic of the separation which had developed between all the former mates once the cheer squad no longer existed. That was the last contact I had with any of them until meeting Mike B. by chance at a deli in Myaree in 1990 and then, 25 years later, catching up with him purposefully on the Gold Coast in September 2009 and again in Kalgoorlie on 14 July 2011. It is appropriate to end this chapter in a rather abrupt fashion, almost in the middle of a sentence or a train of thought, as that mirrors the actual ending of the West Perth cheer squad in 1986.

## Chapter 5

### Opinions on later developments in WA football (1987-2013)

#### ***How the WAFL could have been saved in 1986 (if anyone had cared)***

Indicative of Western Australia's "either-or" (not "both-and") mentality in relation to higher-level sport, no-one in Western Australian football ever seriously suggested in 1986 that the VFL/AFL or the WAFL make any type of reasonable effort to safeguard the WAFL competition's future. Possible alternative formats never considered include any or all of the following:

(a) playing VFL/AFL games mid-week on Tuesday or Wednesday nights as the National Football League's Wills Cup was played in the 1970s and how State of Origin rugby-league and Champions League European soccer are played today; and / or

(b) reducing the size of both seasons and playing the VFL/AFL and WAFL seasons one after the other with one running from January to June and the other from July to November similar to how the A-League plays in summer and the state soccer premier leagues in winter or how the "Super 15" rugby competition season finishes several months prior to the finish of the club-based rugby competitions in Sydney and Brisbane; and / or

(c) accepting only extant, traditional club teams into a national league rather than composite teams. This model is more likely to keep the second-tier leagues strong as supporters of the clubs left in the second-tier will be less likely to switch to the national league side than under the composite-club model. You would then have a situation similar, at least in theory, to one Midlands-based club being promoted one division in English soccer (say, Birmingham City) while all the others stayed where they were (Aston Villa, Walsall, etc.) It would not have a great effect on any of the divisions/leagues. My preferred options would have been (a) combined with (c).

If any or all of these ideas had been tried perhaps the WAFL might have larger crowds and a higher profile than it has today. However, we must remember Brisbane Strikers' soccer player Frank Farina's comments about Australian sporting crowds. English fans "who support

Huddersfield Town in division five will [always] support Huddersfield Town”, according to Farina. In the case of English soccer, in the Blue Square Premier League (the former Vauxhall Conference and fifth-tier of the pyramid), the once strong Football League clubs Cambridge United, Luton Town, and Oxford United averaged crowds of 3156, 6816, and 6376 respectively in the 2008-09 season with the highest crowds for these three clubs being 4870, 8223, and 10613 (up to and including 9 November 2008<sup>353</sup>). These are obviously very good crowds for teams playing at the fifth-tier of the pyramid and outside the Football League and are indicative of strong supporter loyalty towards these traditional clubs.

Luton Town's record average home crowd of 13,452 in 1982-83<sup>354</sup>, when the club played in the then First Division, means that crowds dropped only by 55% between 1982-83 and 2008-09 despite a drop of *four* tiers. In contrast to English fans, according to Frank Farina, Australian fans will only watch, in any significant numbers, what they *perceive* to be the premier or the national competition in any sport. This caveat must be borne in mind when considering any of my suggested alternative solutions (a) to (c) above. WAFL crowds have fallen by around 75% since 1986 although the WAFL clubs have effectively dropped down *only by one tier* if we regard the old VFL, WAFL, and SANFL as having all been on tier-one of the pyramid in the pre-West Coast era. We can compare that decline to the 55% drop off in crowds experienced by Luton Town after it dropped by *four tiers*.

### ***West Coast Eagles' inaugural playing squad (1987)***

The official WPEC historian Brian Atkinson states that West Perth sometimes did not receive its fair share of state team representatives in years when the club made the finals.<sup>355</sup> Atkinson comments that: “The failure of any West Perth player to gain state selection in 1984 was a matter of great controversy within the West Perth camp”<sup>356</sup>, especially as the club was in third place at the time the team was selected (only to eventually miss the finals). The West Coast Eagles' initial 35-man squad

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<sup>353</sup> Source: *Non League* magazine [UK], December 2009 edition, p. 42.

<sup>354</sup> Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luton\\_Town\\_F.C.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luton_Town_F.C.) [accessed 8 April 2011].

<sup>355</sup> Atkinson, *it's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 202.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

for season 1987 was also disheartening for some West Perth supporters.

The five West Perth players chosen were: John Gastev, Sean King, Dean Laidley, Paul Mifka, and Dean Warwick with King being a later addition to the original 32-player squad which was first announced at the official launch at Perth's Merlin (now Hyatt) Hotel<sup>357</sup>. These players were bright and promising youngsters but arguably, with the exception of Laidley and perhaps Gastev, they had not yet developed the consistency or backlog of strong performances to merit selection. The five West Perth players in the initial West Coast squad were clearly chosen, if not at random, then by people largely disrespectful or apathetic towards the club.

Favourite sons of the club, such as Phil Bradmore, Les Fong, and Peter Menaglio were wilfully overlooked although their careers were still active and their playing performances were still strong. Although Brian Atkinson "did not have any strong feelings either way"<sup>358</sup>, he states "you would have to include Fong and Menaglio" as the top two players for the club during the drought-era and prior to the formation of West Coast (i.e. 1976-86). Both Fong and Menaglio were named in the club's "Team of the Century", Menaglio on the left-wing and Fong as the first rover.<sup>359</sup> Menaglio continued to play senior football with West Perth up until the 1989 season<sup>360</sup> so he was hardly "over the hill" by late 1986. Bradmore's birth-date is 2 April 1959; Fong's is 24 August 1956 whilst Menaglio's is 4 September 1958, making these three players 27, 30, and 28-years-of-age, respectively, as at October 1986.<sup>361</sup> (As mentioned, Menaglio won the Breckler Medal for club fairest-and-best in 1984 whilst Bradmore won it the following year. Menaglio was also equal runner-up behind the three tied winners for the 1984 Sandover Medal.<sup>362</sup> Les Fong was a close runner-up to Menaglio in the 1984 Breckler Medal count and, from 1981-84, Menaglio and Fong shared four Breckler Medals.)<sup>363</sup> Fong top-scored for the club with 14 votes at the 1986 Sandover Medal count, won by Mark Bairstow of South Fremantle, although, astonishingly, there

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<sup>357</sup> Source: Christian, G. (1986), "Bennett, Turner join the Eagles", *The West Australian*, 31 October, pp. 103-4; *The West Australian*, 31 October 1986, player profiles, p. 102.

<sup>358</sup> Source: Personal conversation with the author, 8 July 2011.

<sup>359</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, Appendix 2, p. 270.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 350, 356, 367.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

were no West Perth players *in the top 24* (yes, read that again, it is not a typo).<sup>364</sup>

Also worthy of consideration for selection by West Coast in late 1986 were Corry Bewick, Derek Kickett, and George Michalczyk. A newspaper report at the time suggested that Darren Bewick, younger brother of Corry, was not chosen because he had elected to remain in Perth for two more years to complete his teaching degree.<sup>365</sup> It appears that West Perth was unfashionable for the corporate set that was running West Coast, compared to players from East Fremantle and Subiaco, despite the fact that West Perth had beaten East Fremantle consistently in 1985. The disrespect shown to the club's favourite sons, and especially to Bradmore, Fong, and Menaglio, rankled with some West Perth supporters. It would have been a mark of respect to Fong and to the club if Fong had been selected, if only for one or two seasons, in the same way that Robert Wiley of Perth Demons (formerly of Richmond) had been brought into the West Coast squad for 1987 at the twilight of that player's esteemed career.

West Coast's initial squad was chosen for the future and, in hindsight, we might fail to realize how young the players were then since now, looking back, we remember the distinguished VFL/AFL careers that many of that initial squad went on to have. Even Phil Narkle was allegedly only 24-years-old despite already having played at St Kilda for three seasons.<sup>366</sup> (In fact *The West Australian* of 31 October 1986 was in error: Narkle was actually 25-years-old as at 31 October 1986. The ninth 2011 edition of *The Encyclopaedia of AFL Footballers* at page 627 lists his birth date as being 29 January 1961.) Don Holmes (27-years-old), Glendinning (30), Turner (27), and Wiley (31) were the only inaugural West Coast players aged over 25 as at 31 October 1986 according to *The West Australian*.<sup>367</sup> It seems that the general principle which guided selection was to only select players aged over 25 if they had prior VFL/AFL experience. Bradmore's prior VFL/AFL experience seems to have been either forgotten or discounted. In hindsight, at least, West Coast erred with its selection of the five West Perth players in 1987 *or it clearly picked players that it had no real intention, in advance, of*

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<sup>364</sup> Source: *The West Australian*, 16 September 1986, pp. 87-8.

<sup>365</sup> Christian, "Bennett, Turner join the Eagles", pp. 103-4.

<sup>366</sup> *The West Australian*, 31 October 1986, player profiles, p. 102.

<sup>367</sup> Source: *Ibid.*, p. 102.

*awarding game time to*. King and Mifka managed only one game each for West Coast and Warwick played zero. Early Eagles squad members from Swan Districts such as Kevin Caton (1 West Coast game, 1988); Joe Cormack (10 games, 1988); Don Holmes (23 games, 1987-89); Brent Hutton (13 games, 1988-89); and Don Langsford (zero games) suffered similar fates which further soured the relationship between Swans and West Coast.

At the 1986 Sandover Medal count Laidley was equal second among West Perth players with 13 votes while Gastev was fourth highest with 11 votes. However, Warwick and King were way down the list, polling only two votes each and coming in at equal 15<sup>th</sup> for the club, while Mifka polled no votes at all. West Perth supporters could be forgiven for having being somewhat mystified about the five West Perth players selected. Had they been picked with only a bare minimum of thought just to make up the numbers with the West Coast leadership having had no serious prior intention of awarding any of them serious game time? Were people like Ron Alexander and Graham Moss unduly influenced by old WAFL club rivalries which led to them give insufficient thought to the selection of West Perth players and insufficient respect to the players who had played best for West Perth in the prior three seasons? West Perth's 1986 Sandover Medal vote-getters' list should have been given more respect and consideration by the West Coast leaders.

Apart from Laidley, only Gastev later had anything resembling a successful VFL/AFL career and the vast majority of his games (113 out of 143) were played with the Brisbane Bears. Similarly, Laidley is better known today, as his Wikipedia page writes, for his 99 games for North Melbourne rather than for his earlier stint at West Coast.<sup>368</sup> The 1994 West Coast premiership team featured *zero* West Perth players or ex-West Perth players. However, Craig Turley did play 115 games for West Coast between 1989 and 1995 and was a 1992 premiership player. A further reason for the my initial dislike of West Coast, which has mellowed only but slightly over the years, was the lack of West Perth players in the team. I support any club playing against West Coast as they are the temporary embodiment of my hopes and dreams.

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<sup>368</sup> Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean\\_Laidley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean_Laidley) [accessed 6 March 2011].

***West Perth's move to Joondalup, East Perth's move to Leederville***

The last season I attended nearly every West Perth game was 1998. Since 2004 I have not been living in Western Australia and just return for holidays. I enjoyed attending West Perth away games more than home games in 1998. In fact, because of the move to Arena Joondalup by the West Perth club in 1994, the “home” games in 1998 felt more like away games and the away games felt more like home games because I had been going to places like East Fremantle Oval, Claremont Oval, and Lathlain Park since I was a seven-year-old. By contrast, Arena Joondalup remains a totally foreign place to me. Arena Joondalup feels very different from the traditional WAFL grounds because it has no seating around the perimeter of the ground and the grandstand is literally one side wall of the adjacent, gigantic, multi-sports complex rather than the main focus in and of itself. The grandstand is not open to the public, making the oval, or should we say the “arena”, very much in tune with the elitist spirit of modern corporate football.

It is indeed very hard to fall in love with Arena Joondalup. The lack of seats around the perimeter of the ground is annoying as not everyone likes to sit on grassed banks or to stand up. There was literally a total lack of covered seating at the ground for non-members for several years and, when a tin-shed was later installed, it was placed in the north-west corner (to replicate the situation at Leederville Oval perhaps?), the farthest location possible from the single public entrance which is in the south-west corner. Arena Joondalup, although a WAFL ground, symbolizes everything that is wrong with modern corporate football with the non-members unashamedly and very openly treated as second-rate customers. The original lack of seating under the tin-shed might have been an (ultimately inauthentic) attempt at producing a “retro WAFL look” but clearly the lack of seating under the tin shed was due to financial reasons. (Please note that seating has now been installed under the tin-shed but there is still no passageway through the grandstand for non-members so you still have to walk all around the outer grassed bank to get to the tin-shed from the main entrance.)

Brian Atkinson, in his excellent book, in personal e-mail correspondence, and in personal conversation (8 July 2011), has carefully outlined his view as to why the move to Joondalup, “rationally”,



was the right move for West Perth. He argues in terms of it allowing West Perth access to a large junior network of clubs and players in the rapidly expanding northern suburbs<sup>369</sup> whereas the club's traditional district, around Leederville Oval, is not a place now where significant numbers of juniors live. He states that the Leederville Oval area nowadays is home mostly to "yuppies and pensioners"<sup>370</sup>. Supporting this view, a look through *The Football Budget* at the source clubs for colts and reserves players suggests that the areas around Leederville Oval are not supplying junior players beyond a tiny trickle to *any* of the nine WAFL clubs. In Atkinson's words:<sup>371</sup>

"I certainly miss Leederville [Oval] as well. Once WP [West Perth] left no one could stop EP [East Perth] of [sic] Subi [i.e. Subiaco] going there. EP's ground became a soccer stadium. I cover the move to Joondalup in my book. I was not involved at all in the move but I believed it was necessary and still do. Our development zone had dried up with demographic changes to the metro area. The only way WP could obtain that very productive northern coastal corridor development zone was to move into the area. After a 20 year premiership drought at Leederville, 800 more kids became available for development. The result - 5 grand finals and 3 premierships in the 1st ten years at Joondalup. East Perth had the same problem and the only success they have had at Leederville with their 3 premierships was when they had ALL of the champion young West Coast Eagles draftees available to them, which was a disgrace and a blot on the integrity for 2000-2002. And Subi have a huge unfair financial advantage by having access to 500 under cover seats to All AFL games at Subi which they packageup [sic] with hospitality, and receive huge profits".

Furthermore, in a follow-up e-mail, Atkinson continued as follows<sup>372</sup>:

"The only problem with moving back to our traditional inner city area is that as soon as the next junior boundaries redistribution occurred the West Australian Football Commission (WAFC) would reallocate our old zone back to us and we would lose the booming northern coastal junior zone that has been so good to us. In the early nineties we were given that zone on condition we moved into the area. I was a [WAFC] Commissioner from 1992 to 1995 and I saw what was happening first hand. I have had West Perth people say to me that we could have been given that good junior development zone, and stayed at Leederville. That was never a possibility - the WAFC was very firm that if West Perth stayed at Leederville the club would not get that zone. I can say I don't like the 52 km round trip to watch a home game, but from a football point of view it has been a great move. The best illustration of that is that when the club won the 1995

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<sup>369</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 222.

<sup>370</sup> Source: Personal conversation, 8 July 2011.

<sup>371</sup> Source: Personal e-mail communication to the author dated 15 November 2010.

<sup>372</sup> Source: Personal e-mail communication to the author dated 17 November 2010.

premiership, the draft and retirements meant that four years later there were only four of that premiership team left at the club (Brendan Fewster, Steve Trehwella, Brendan Logan, and Paul Mifka). They won the premiership again and practically all of the new players were local juniors. A similar thing happened in 2003 when they were premiers again. Having said all that, I do miss Leederville, but there was no chance that we could have enjoyed the successes we had at Joondalup if we were still at Leederville struggling with our old zone. I remember sitting in the stand during the 20 year premiership drought and saw some terrible thrashings”.

Perth and East Perth are still today in similar positions to West Perth's former situation at Leederville Oval with declining numbers in their inner-city junior zones, although Perth is somewhat compensated for this due to its access to the burgeoning south-eastern corridor. East Perth and West Perth, in fact, had to combine their junior competition,<sup>373</sup> something that would have been inconceivable even 20 years previously. None of the three “Perth clubs” experienced grand final success during the relatively long period from 1979-94. Perth's last premiership remains today its 1977 triumph and its last grand final was in 1978. Atkinson, in the second e-mail cited above, *assumes* that West Perth's move to Arena Joondalup was the *primary* reason for the end of the 20-year premiership drought in 1995 and for the fact that West Perth won three premierships in the nine-year period which ended in 2003 (and four premierships if we include the more recent 2013 victory). For Atkinson, the move is the primary reason for the premiership successes because the Joondalup area gave us access to a much larger number of junior players.

I cannot dispute Atkinson's logic here and he without a shadow of a doubt loves the game and the club. However, his main assumption that the premierships were *primarily caused* by the ground shift, whilst extremely plausible, remains unproven and unprovable. Statistically even the club with the *worst* zone will occasionally win premierships because it just happens to get a group of quality players together at the same time either by chance and / or by careful planning. Statistically a town of 50,000 people will produce a team equally as good as a team from a city of one million people *on occasion* even holding all other factors constant. The remarkable success of many Geraldton-based footballers at the East Fremantle club and in the VFL/AFL over the years

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<sup>373</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 222.

is testament to this. It cannot be disproven that one or two or even all three of the 1995-2003 premierships might still have been won by West Perth if the club had stayed where it was. Furthermore, Mike B.<sup>374</sup> has asked me why West Perth could not have stayed at Leederville Oval and accessed a zone in the far northern suburbs in the same way that Perth has stayed at Lathlain Park but has a zone extending far past Lathlain into the populous south-eastern corridor? Did West Perth not bargain hard enough in 1993? Why was it one rule for Perth and another one for West Perth? Admittedly one answer to this question could be that the northern suburbs are more “crowded” than the south-eastern corridor with Claremont, Subiaco, and West Perth all having historic and legitimate ties there.

Atkinson stated<sup>375</sup> that if the WAFC attempted to take away West Perth’s zone and push the club still further north then the club could say in response “why not just allow existing clubs such as Subiaco and Claremont to have a second zone in the far-far north so that West Perth’s zone would not move north of its headquarters for the second time”? Based on this logic alone, of course, West Perth could and should have stayed at Leederville Oval and *also* secured a large far northern suburbs zone back in 1993-94.

Furthermore, there was a nine season mini-drought between the 2003 and 2013 premierships, a mini-drought which was nearly half as long as the famed 1976-94 drought. If the Leederville Oval location can be blamed for the 1976-94 drought then what or whom can be held responsible for the 2004-12 mini-drought? If the mini-drought was just due to bad luck or the strength of opposition clubs can’t we then make the same arguments for the 1976-94 drought?

Moving on, I wonder how many changes in club names and moves of home grounds can occur before a club’s essence is diluted or even lost. The club is now “the Falcons”, rather than “the Cardinals”, and is based at Arena Joondalup. I feel that, if the West Perth name goes, the last link with the old club will also go. Other people may well think differently. Some regard the old club as lost already. For some others, at the opposite end of the spectrum, the red-and-blue colours and / or the unbroken chain of history may be the *decisive* link between the old club

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<sup>374</sup> Source: Personal interview, 14 July 2011.

<sup>375</sup> Source: Personal interview, 8 July 2011.

and the new club. Is there an authentic, as opposed to a merely corporate or legal, connection between the old Fitzroy club and the Brisbane Lions? Is the Sydney Swans the “same club” as the club called South Melbourne which used to play its home games at the Lakeside Oval? People would have different views here and those who feel that the clubs are not the same and / or it is just not worth the effort will choose another club, another competition, and / or another code to follow. Fitzroy’s last AFL-era president just before the coerced 1996-97 merger with Brisbane Bears, Dyson Hore-Lacy, wrote in 2000 that: “Very few of the Fitzroy members have gone over to Brisbane. Many, if not most, Fitzroy people have drifted away from AFL football completely”.<sup>376</sup> I can recall a statistic which said that 50% of old Fitzroy fans support the Brisbane Lions; 10% support another AFL club; and 40% no longer follow AFL.<sup>377</sup> Rational arguments will only take us so far as emotion remains an important part of serious fandom in all codes of football.

Moving from Leederville to Joondalup was not just a move “down the street” as was the case when Subiaco moved to Leederville Oval in the 2000s. East Perth and Subiaco were both effectively forced to shift home grounds by the Perth Glory situation and the AFL situation respectively at their former grounds. This is why I have some sympathy for those two clubs’ present situations.

By contrast, West Perth chose freely to detach itself from its community. Unlike in the case of Subiaco’s move, Leederville and Joondalup are totally different areas with vastly different cultures and demographics. The Swan Districts Football Club could survive a move to Midland and probably even to Middle Swan (say to somewhere up near the home of Swan United Soccer Club). However, could it relocate to middle-class Ellenbrook (a shiny new suburb of golf-clubs, Soccer Mums, and SUVs) and still stay *the same club* with that eternal, mongrel, underdog ethos (that even its detractors respect)?

How far could you move Millwall from south-east London before it ceased to be the same club? South-west London-based Wimbledon FC supporters by and large rejected the club’s 2003 re-location to the North London satellite town of Milton Keynes (72km from London) to become the MK Dons. A new club Wimbledon AFC was formed in response to

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<sup>376</sup> Hore-Lacy, D. (2000), *Fitzroy* (Fitzroy, Australia: Lion Publications), p. 252.

<sup>377</sup> Source: Unknown.

this rejection. No-one regards the Los Angeles Dodgers as being the same club as the Brooklyn Dodgers except only in the most narrow, literal, legal sense. At our coffee meeting on 8 July 2011, Atkinson added some further thoughts on the move from Leederville Oval. Here he moves away from the purely rational to also give some space to emotional considerations<sup>378</sup>:

“The reason I was happy we left Leederville was because I sat in that grandstand and I watched us get thrashed week-in week-out. We would not have won our premierships without moving and we would not have had access to that zone. ... Since they went to Joondalup they have never been bad or non-competitive, never mind had a period when I said ‘I’m sick of this’, not referring here to a game but to a period. Their period at Joondalup has been highly successful, five grand-finals and three premierships in the first ten years. Since then there have been some exciting times but there has not been a grand final since 2003. Even though West Perth has not had the money to recruit widely, unlike South Fremantle, Subi, Swans now, they have replaced the players with quality juniors from their own district. What I find very satisfying is that when they won the premiership in 1995, four years later when they won it [again] there were only four [1995] premiership players still at the club. When they won in ‘03 there were only six members from the ‘99 premiership still at the club. Almost all of those replacements were home-grown. From my point of view, I have enjoyed the football at Joondalup much more than the previous twenty years at Leederville. I was not involved when the move was made [Atkinson was club president in 1987-88 and the move was in 1993-94] but I spend half my time defending the move, saying how successful it was. ... The spirit of our club has never been better [although] we don’t get looked after well by people there”.

For Atkinson then, rational factors and emotional factors are inseparable from each other and they have both moved in the same direction since, emotionally, the misery of watching games during the last few years at Leederville is part of the *evidence* as to why, *rationally*, the move to Joondalup was correct (because moving to Joondalup gave the club access to more juniors which then fed into the club’s playing performances).

Atkinson does not mention the 2004-12 mini-drought of nine seasons (seven seasons as at the date of his quoted statement) and he does not appear to be unduly alarmed by it. He also perhaps over-focuses on those last few years at Leederville Oval when the club did poorly, especially 1990-92, whilst not recognizing that, from 1976-86, the

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<sup>378</sup> Source: Personal conversation with the author, 8 July 2011.

club never took the wooden-spoon and was seventh only once (in 1979). Being on the bottom of the table for two to three years will befall all clubs as part of the natural cycle of birth-and-death / rise-and-fall and is not necessarily something that Leederville Oval itself can be blamed for. Swans and Claremont both suffered several years of misery in the mid-1970s before rising to become powers in the early-1980s and Subiaco was an even worse basket-case in the decade prior to Haydn Bunton Junior taking over the coaching reins in 1984.

West Perth suffered many retirements and departures to South Australia and Victoria prior to its very poor 1990-92 seasons. The on-field heroes of the cheer squad era (1984-86), the largely forgotten and woefully underrated Brendon Bell; Bradmore; Comerford; the Bewick brothers Corry and Darren; Davis; Fong; Gastev; Kickett; Menaglio; Michalczyk; Mugavin; Munns; Murnane; Perrin; Rogers; and Doug Simms had all gone by 1990 with Menaglio being the last of these great warriors to leave at the end of the 1989 season. The returns of Laidley and Palm were not enough to cancel out all these player losses. The East Fremantle premiership player, Gavin Wake, who was quite a recruiting coup and who gave good service to West Perth, was also gone by 1990. Atkinson is currently one of the prophets defending the relocation to Joondalup on a regular basis to all or any of the detractors and doubters. He will probably be able to persuade some and maybe most people but certainly not all.

The move of sporting bodies towards managerialist leadership styles and economic rationalist ideologies occurred at the AFL, the NRL, and the Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) (now the Football Federation of Australia or FFA) during the 1990s. In the early-2000s, the NRL had to deal with a legal judgement ordering the league to reinstate the expelled traditional club South Sydney Rabbitohs. The AFL's coerced merger of traditional club Fitzroy with expansion club Brisbane Bears to form Brisbane Lions in 1996-97 angered not only Fitzroy supporters but also many traditional supporters associated with other clubs. Melbourne-based crime novelist Peter Temple, in his 1999 novel *Black Tide*<sup>379</sup>, wrote about the anguish at Fitzroy pub The Prince when it was announced that a corporate person from Brisbane wanted to buy all of the Fitzroy memorabilia on the pub's walls. Temple's main character,

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<sup>379</sup> Temple, P. (2007), *Black Tide*, Hardcover edition (London: Quercus), pp. 23-7, 60-2, 97-100.

the lawyer / private eye / debt-collector Jack Irish tries unsuccessfully to motivate Fitzroy fans at The Prince to switch to attending St Kilda games in 1997.

Ex-Richmond and St Kilda players, Rex Hunt and Graeme Bond, write in their book, *The Fat Lady sings: 40 Years in Footy*<sup>380</sup>, about the topics of coerced mergers, ground rationalizations, and the national expansion of the VFL/AFL. About Fitzroy's last game in the VFL/AFL, Hunt and Bond write: "There was sadness mixed with pride for one of the VFL's founding clubs ... but also anger and bitterness towards the AFL, which the faithful held responsible for Fitzroy's demise"<sup>381</sup>. About the failure of the 1996 Melbourne-Hawthorn merger talks to bear fruit, the same authors write:

"The final result was great to see because the game could not afford to lose any more of the traditional [ex-VFL] clubs.

The often bitter battle demonstrated that any merger discussions in the future would be an ill-advised solution to the woes of any struggling Melbourne-based teams".<sup>382</sup>

Afraid of vehement public backlash in its Melbourne heartland, the AFL's approach since 1996 has simply been to add expansion clubs to its national league instead of relegating clubs or forcing mergers. The AFL competition has had 18 teams since 2012 when Greater Western Sydney Giants (GWS) played its first season. Although the main trend in Australian top-tier sport today is towards corporatism, there is also a secondary move back towards traditionalism, with North Melbourne in the AFL and Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs in the NRL both recently reverting to their traditional club names.

My suggestion, as posed to Brian Atkinson by e-mail, was: Why does West Perth not move away from the traditional Western Australian "either-or" mentality to a "both-and" form of thinking? If the West Perth club is determined to stay at Arena Joondalup (I would personally prefer a more old-style, less corporate ground such as Kingsway Reserve in Madeley or the Wanneroo Showgrounds or the Osborne Park Showgrounds aka Robinson Reserve<sup>383</sup>), why not play three or four

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<sup>380</sup> Hunt and Bond, *The Fat Lady sings*.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>383</sup> Osborne Park Showgrounds is the former home of the Osborne Park FC until 1983 and the current home ground of the Amateur team. The Showgrounds were used for WAFA finals, and also Grand

home-and-away games a year at Leederville Oval? They might attract good crowds of 8,000 or 10,000 people if managed carefully and advertised well.

We should not forget that a crowd of 20,112 people suddenly turned up out of nowhere to watch the last West Perth game at Leederville Oval on Sunday 22 August 1993<sup>384</sup>, which was ironic because, if the club had had average home crowds of even one-third of that number in 1993, it may not have had to move to Joondalup. The photograph on p. 219 of Atkinson's *It's a Grand Old Flag* shows West Perth's "golden oldies" teams warming up in front of the huge crowd on the old Leederville Oval scoreboard bank (now largely gone) on this day in August 1993. Some morbid people will come out of the woodwork to watch a club (strictly speaking an era not a club) in its death agonies. There are still literally thousands of West Perth fans and ex-fans lying dormant out there in the inner- and outer-northern suburbs stretching 30 kilometres from Leederville through Tuart Hill through Nollamara through Balga through Greenwood through Carine and up to Joondalup. Many of these thousands were part of the crowd that day, 22 August 1993.

Significantly, the NRL clubs St George Illawarra Dragons and Manly-Warringah Sea Eagles have kept their cramped, quaint, traditional, inner-city grounds at Kogarah Oval and Brookvale Oval respectively. St George even chose to host a final recently at Kogarah Oval in front of 18,000 diehard St George supporters rather than in the cavernous open spaces of Aussie Stadium where 60,000 people might have attended with St George fans not necessarily being a majority. Although part of the terms of the merger agreement between Balmain Tigers and Western Suburbs Magpies, it should be pointed out that three NRL games per year are still played by NRL club Wests Tigers at Balmain's traditional ground Leichardt Oval, the NRL equivalent of Victoria Park or Windy Hill. A Friday night telecast match on 24 June 2011 between West Tigers, the home team, and Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs was played at Campbelltown Stadium (formerly Orana Park) in Sydney's outer south-west fringe. The ground, previously home ground to Western Suburbs Magpies and Newtown Jets and now venue for a

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Finals after the WAFA was no longer permitted to use the W.A.C.A. The Osborne Park Show is being held there on November 17 and 18 this year 2017 (Source: *WA Sunday Footy* Facebook page, 23 October 2017).

<sup>384</sup> Atkinson, *It's a Grand Old Flag*, p. 219.



few Wests Tigers home games each season, was nearly full to its 21,000 capacity although it was just 7 degrees Celsius at kick-off time. Michael Ennis of Canterbury-Bankstown spoke to the media on receiving his Man of the Match award and stated how much he enjoyed playing on such an old-style, traditional ground.

West Perth could follow this West Tigers' model by playing some home games away from Arena Joondalup including a few games back at Leederville Oval (say between one and four games a season). However, as few Australian Rules Football fans in the southern states follow rugby-league, many of the game's fans and administrators are not knowledgeable about worthwhile and plausible alternatives to the status quo which rugby-league has already tried. We do not even need to look to rugby-league for an alternative solution. In the SANFL, Woodville and West Torrens merged to form Woodville-West Torrens Eagles in 1991. Most home games are played at Woodville's Woodville Oval. However, former West Torrens' supporters are not forgotten. Two or three night home games per year are played at Thebarton Oval (the former home of West Torrens) which is also the merged club's pre-season base.

Like the AFL and NRL, the WAFL was also hit by the corporatization trend during the 1990s, even though the WAFL's most attractive aspect remained then and remains today its "retro" appeal to a largely older generation of football supporters. It has to be said that applying managerialist principles and ideologies at that second-tier level has, on occasion, looked quite ridiculous. During the 1990s the WAFL changed its name to the trendier "Westar Rules" (1997-99) and encouraged club mergers, relocations, and ground-sharing arrangements. The 2000s saw the yuppification of Leederville Oval so that the now "boutique ground" allegedly merges seamlessly with the inner-city, latte culture of nearby Oxford Street. This redevelopment suggests a certain naivety that assumes that the Oxford Street-Mt Lawley latte set is the same demographic that does or might conceivably watch WAFL football games if only the football grounds themselves became trendier.

Basically, the WAFL in the 1990s hired managerialist CEOs and it attempted to shamelessly follow the same strategies and ideologies used in the AFL and North American professional sports. Fixture dates and times were fooled around with, the most silly and thoughtless of all being the 29 March 1987 scheduling of a West Perth versus East Perth

game (the pride of the old way of life) after the West Coast versus Richmond debut VFL/AFL clash at Subiaco Oval (the first game of Modern Football)<sup>385</sup>. Of course, the crowd streamed out of the ground at the end of the VFL/AFL fixture, leaving only a handful of people in the ground to see the WAFL match<sup>386</sup>. This must have been incredibly disheartening to the WAFL players and officials involved. The WAFL deserved much more respect than this and the WAFL leaders did appear to learn from this day and similar mistakes for a while, shifting back to all Saturday afternoon WAFL games in 1988, a year in which WAFL crowds stabilized or even grew slightly.

However, clubs such as Perth Demons were under continual pressure during the 1990s to merge or to relocate to the outer metropolitan area. Only West Perth ultimately left its inner-city ground, and the club now “stands out like a sore thumb” “all dressed up and nowhere to go” much like the former Soviet Union after the October 1917 Russian Revolution when it was expected that other European countries would soon follow the Soviets’ lead and become communist. Joseph Stalin famously invented the doctrine of “socialism in one country” whilst West Perth’s current doctrine appears to be “relocation at one club”, i.e. it does not admit that it possibly jumped the gun but just keeps on its operations regardless, hosting traditional clubs at Joondalup and visiting those clubs at their inner-city traditional grounds including the farcical situation of playing “away games” against both Subiaco and East Perth at Leederville Oval.

After Peel Thunder was added to the WAFL competition in 1997, it was realized that, firstly, the traditional clubs were the league’s greatest assets and, secondly, it is very difficult to start up a new club that can compete on the same level on the playing field as the traditional clubs. The on-field failure of Peel Thunder over many years meant that the traditional WAFL clubs were accorded more respect by all stakeholders, including the WAFC/WAFL hierarchy, and the forces pushing relocations became much less vocal. In that sense, Peel Thunder has proven to be a blessing to all of the traditional clubs although the traditional clubs have proven to be far from grateful.

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<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

It appears unlikely as at the date of writing (6 January 2017) that any other WAFL club will relocate other than probably East Fremantle back to Fremantle Oval for senior-team home-games only. South Fremantle effectively cannot move in any direction as it is bounded by the river and the ocean to the north and the west, by East Fremantle to the east, and now by Peel Thunder to the south. Perth apparently is no longer considering the possibility of relocation<sup>387</sup> with the legendary Perth premiership coach Ken Armstrong expressing a view, in Perth's official history book<sup>388</sup>, that to do so might cause Perth to lose its essence and to die. Armstrong<sup>389</sup> also refers to the fact that many of the ex-Sunday Football League clubs exist in the south-eastern corridor already, clubs now not so much smaller than Perth itself, and it is not easy to win new fans. Various trial home-and-away fixtures played in the south-eastern corridor by Perth have attracted crowds no bigger than, and sometimes smaller than, the crowds that the club regularly attracts to Lathlain Park.

However, Perth's case is arguably not exactly the same as West Perth's since Perth is able to keep its south-east suburban zone whether it shifts further down the south-east corridor or stays where it is in the extreme north-west corner of its zone. Given this dynamic, it may as well stay where it is because tradition is on the side of Lathlain Park and Lathlain Park is much more accessible to the majority of away team supporters, and also many or even most Perth supporters, than are the possible mooted relocation location areas such as Gosnells, Maddington, and Kelmscott.

This leads us on to an important related point that West Perth and the WAFC completely ignored with the move to Arena Joondalup. The old, inner-city, traditional grounds may look like obsolete relics to a casual observer but, if WAFL supporters are now scattered throughout the metropolitan area, the inner-city grounds still have the *advantage* that they are not too far removed geographically from anywhere or anyone. Atkinson refers to this point in his second e-mail reproduced above. Away team supporters of other WAFL clubs, especially south-of-the-river clubs, can more easily travel to Leederville Oval than to Arena

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<sup>387</sup> This section about the possible relocation of Perth was written prior to the recent redevelopment of the ground. The redeveloped ground is meant to house both West Coast Eagles and Perth Demons.

<sup>388</sup> Cited in East et al., *From Redlegs to Demons*, p. 151.

<sup>389</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Joondalup. Few away team fans presently visit Rushton Park in Mandurah or Arena Joondalup which is why average crowds at these two remote venues tend to be smaller now than average crowds at Bassendean Oval (the pace-setters for crowds in the current era), Lathlain Park or Fremantle Oval. Because of the relentless urban sprawl that characterizes modern-day Perth, it is a 100-120 kilometre round trip from Mandurah to Joondalup or from Armadale to Joondalup. Atkinson refers (above) to his 52 kilometre round trip to West Perth home games at Arena Joondalup from his house in Wembley Downs.

The absence of away team fans definitely has a negative effect on match-day atmospheres at Rushton Park and Arena Joondalup which lowers crowds yet further in a vicious cycle. In fact, the online journalist John Devaney of Fullpointsfooty.net documents that West Perth's average crowds for 1994 at Arena Joondalup (4,011) were *smaller*, by a fair margin, than those for 1993 at Leederville Oval (5,218)<sup>390</sup>. I suspect that what happened in 1994 was probably a large drop in away fans attending West Perth home games as well as a drop in the number of West Perth fans living in the vicinity of Leederville Oval going to Arena Joondalup. It would be interesting to know how many West Perth supporters are Leederville Oval-era fans and how many are people who go to the games primarily because they live close to the new oval in Joondalup. Of this second group how many are old-time West Perth fans and how many would basically follow any club if it was based in the Joondalup region, i.e. their primary loyalty is to the *region* rather than to the WPEC?

A worrying factor regarding the future of the WAFL competition is that crowds, as far as I can ascertain, are made up of mostly men (and a few women) aged over 30 and children aged below 13. The children enjoy being able to kick footballs on the oval at breaks and hear the coaches address the players at quarter time and three-quarter time. However, key demographics that do not seem to attend WAFL games in large numbers presently are teenagers and people in their twenties. In one of the crowd pictures in this book, taken at the Perth versus Swan Districts' game at Lathlain Park on 2 July 2011, there is a young guy in his twenties, looking remarkably like the late Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols from the back, who is in centre-shot of the group of Perth

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<sup>390</sup> Source: [http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west\\_perth\\_\(3\).htm](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/west_perth_(3).htm) [accessed 6 March 2011].

supporters standing on the concrete terraces in front of the can bar. This guy stands out also for being the only supporter visible in this crowd picture who is clearly and unarguably aged in his twenties. As this book has demonstrated, teenagers were a key element of loyal WAFL support in the 1980s and they would regularly travel to WAFL grounds on Saturday afternoons on the trains and buses in their twos and threes or even all alone to meet up with other young people at the grounds.

As the current group of WAFL supporters gets older and its more senior members pass away, the competition needs to be able to replace them with a younger demographic. The WAFC/WAFL needs to think very carefully about this issue as do the nine clubs. The WAFL has probably attracted few supporters, whether younger people or interstate or international migrants, who were not already supporters during the WAFL's Golden Era which concluded in 1986. A person who was 8-years-old when West Coast was formed in 1986 is now 39-years-old. Such a person is probably not a dedicated WAFL supporter having no personal memory of the WAFL's Golden Era. Perhaps consideration could be given to granting free concession entry to WAFL games and extending this to tertiary students aged 25-years or under plus free train travel. I am aware that finances are always a problem, but the WAFL and its clubs should also consider advertising more extensively in youth-focused, high-school, university/TAFE, and community-based publications.

### ***The simple pleasures of lower-tier football***

The WAFL is now similar to non-league English soccer (and lower-tier Scottish leagues), far down what in the UK is termed “the pyramid”, where games are run professionally; the clubs have traditions; and the crowds are small but dedicated. The WAFL has lost, for the most part, its army of “fair-weather fans” that used to attach themselves especially to clubs like East Perth and South Fremantle back in the day. The club diehards have remained, by and large, with the clubs except perhaps for some previously staunch West Perth fans disillusioned by the move to Arena Joondalup. The VFL/AFL era has been a real existential test of people’s loyalties. In the WAFL’s Golden Era, people would declare and pretend that they were hardcore fans of this or that WAFL club but in those days the competition was glorious and people’s loyalties were not really tested. Existentially speaking, those 800-1,000 committed supporters of each WAFL club that continue to attend WAFL games weekly have proven themselves to be the most committed WAFL club supporters by their actions. The great, traditional, ex-NSL, ethnic soccer clubs, such as Adelaide City, Marconi Stallions, Melbourne Knights, Preston Lions, South Melbourne, and Sydney United are now relegated to the Victorian Premier League (VPL) or the equivalent competitions in the other states, and are in exactly the same position as the WAFL clubs.

WAFL football is now still very enjoyable, but in a different way, as these days you can spread yourself out, there are empty seats often to your right and left, and the queues for the toilets, food, and beer are small and manageable. The WAFL is now like the Western Australian premier league soccer, rugby, and rugby-league competitions have always been in that the atmospheres can be wonderful partly because you can assume that all of your fellow spectators are dedicated and knowledgeable insiders! If you do not allow your mind to wander into that place of comparing the new to the old WAFL you will find that attending WAFL games today is quite enjoyable.

Interestingly, disillusioned Manchester United fans set up in June 2005 a community-based club, FC United of Manchester, which plays to small but dedicated crowds in cosy, compact stadiums in a minor league (National League North) below and outside the Football League (sixth-

tier of the pyramid, five tiers below the English Premier League)<sup>391</sup>. Each club financial member owns one share and gets one vote regardless of her / his financial contribution(s). With an average crowd of 1,969 for the 2008-09 season, up to and including 9 November<sup>392</sup>, FC United was then drawing around five times as many people, on average, as the typical club in its division. After moving from Gigg Lane to Broadhurst Park in May 2015, the club averaged a gate of 3,394 in 2015-16, a season-on-season increase of over 57% and the fourth highest attendance in non-League football. The club's record home crowd is 6,731 people at Gigg Lane, Bury versus Brighton & Hove Albion, FA Cup Second Round, on 8 December 2010<sup>393</sup> beating the previous record of 6,023 people versus Great Harwood Town on 22 April 2006<sup>394</sup>.

United FC is an organic and authentic community-based response to the increasing corporatization of soccer and the alienation that now exists between fans and players and between fans and administrators at English Premier League (EPL) level. The grassroots WAFL clubs are the equivalent of FC United of Manchester whereas the West Coast Eagles is the equivalent of Manchester United.

### ***The way forward for the state leagues***

What is the way forward for the tier-two state leagues around the country? The two obvious paths forward, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, are the "retro" approach of the WAFL and the expansion approach of the Queensland Cup rugby-league competition. A third, out-of-left-field approach would see clubs like Port Melbourne from the VFL apply for and join a competition in another state, for example the SANFL. Obviously this option applies to exceptional cases and not to the majority of clubs in a league. A new issue to have recently emerged (not covered in detail in this book) is the fielding of Adelaide Crows and Port Adelaide Power reserves team in the SANFL and West Coast and Fremantle reserves teams in the WAFL. In the WAFL host

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<sup>391</sup> Source: Fuell, T. (2009), "Fans doing it for themselves", *Non League [United Kingdom]*, December, p. 104; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_League\\_North](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_League_North) [accessed 4 November 2016]; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F.C.\\_United\\_of\\_Manchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F.C._United_of_Manchester) [accessed 4 November 2016].

<sup>392</sup> Source: *Non League* magazine, December 2009 issue, p. 102.

<sup>393</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F.C.\\_United\\_of\\_Manchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F.C._United_of_Manchester) [accessed 4 November 2016].

<sup>394</sup> Fuell, "Fans doing it for themselves", p. 104.

clubs are presently (as at December 2016) East Perth for the West Coast reserves and Peel Thunder for the Fremantle reserves.

The Queensland Cup, the former Brisbane suburban rugby-league competition, has expanded to include teams in all of the major Queensland coastal cities, not presently servicing an NRL team, including Cairns (Northern Pride); Mackay (Mackay Cutters); Rockhampton-Yeppoon (CQ Capras); and Sunshine Coast (Sunshine Coast Falcons)<sup>395</sup>. The competition has also expanded south-east to the Gold Coast (Burleigh Bears and Tweed Heads Seagulls), south-west to Ipswich (Ipswich Jets), and overseas to Papua New Guinea (PNG Hunters). Toowoomba Clydesdales formerly played in the competition and hopes to re-enter.

On balance, the Queensland Cup has probably been right to follow the expansion course because the Queensland regional cities are of reasonable size (50,000 to 250,000 people) and rugby-league fans in those cities do not have a local NRL team. I recall once watching Central Comets (now CQ Capras) play a Saturday night game under lights within the cosy confines of Browne Park, Rockhampton, where everyone is within 20-metres of the pitch. The club does a wonderful presentation of the whole event there and, with a crowd of around 3,000 people in a cosy ground, the atmosphere is compelling. However, entry prices remain relatively cheap and there is always a vacant seat directly behind the fence for someone arriving a few minutes before kick-off.

Channel 9 televised Queensland Cup matches from 2012 (replacing the ABC) which has provided a further boost for this second-tier league. Television cameras appeared at the grounds of the three north-coast clubs, CQ Capras (Rockhampton, formerly Central Comets), Mackay Cutters, and Northern Pride (Cairns), for the first time in 2012.

Western Australia is a different proposition in that towns in Western Australia are much smaller than those in Queensland (10,000 or 20,000 people compared to 50,000 or 150,000 people) and any expansion club in the former state would probably follow the path of mediocrity followed by Peel Thunder. On balance, I believe that the WAFL competition should not further expand although clearly the Goldfields and Geraldton regions have appeal. Australian Rules football has a long and wonderful

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<sup>395</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queensland\\_Cup](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queensland_Cup) [accessed 4 November 2016]; <http://www.qrl.com.au/intrust-super-cup/clubs.html> [accessed 4 November 2016].



history in the Goldfields region in particular stretching back over a century. The WAFC/WAFL hierarchy should keenly study Queensland Cup developments as well as, more obviously, developments in the SANFL and VFL.

I now turn my attention to two interesting 2011 developments involving state league clubs in Hobart and Perth. Firstly, Jason “Aker” Akermanis’ turned out for Glenorchy versus Clarence in the Tasmanian State League (TSL) competition on Saturday night 2 April 2011 in Hobart. Because of the presence of Akermanis this game attracted a record crowd of 8,480 people.<sup>396</sup> It is certainly wonderful to see such an accomplished and decorated player give something back to second-tier football. It is probably because Hobart had and has no regular AFL team that Aker attracted larger average crowds at Glenorchy than he would have attracted had he signed on with a WAFL club.

Secondly, Swan Districts’ players were praised by letter writers to the Brisbane-based *Courier-Mail* newspaper, Wendy and Darren Schultz of Sherwood, as a result of 64 Swans players arriving via charter plane in Sherwood, Brisbane to assist in clean-up operations after the floods of January 2011.<sup>397</sup> Of course the letter-writers could not refrain from utilizing the expected poor pun of swans taking well to water! The great attitude of the players involved (there are far fewer unmanageable egos at this level of the game) and the fact that Swan Districts could mobilize as many as 64 players quickly suggests that the smaller WAFL club operations can respond more effectively to at least some emergencies than the AFL corporate behemoths. The actions of the Swans club and its players are consistent with the club’s modern (re-)branding as a community-based club with a community ethos. The cleaning efforts got the club some coverage in the *Courier-Mail* newspaper whereas it would be close to impossible for it to gain newspaper coverage in Brisbane for its actual on-field footballing exploits.

Swans’ act represents existential acting-out of a strategic re-branding which is really just a tinkering and a slight re-emphasis of attributes that the club has possessed throughout its life. The concept of a community-based club assisting a community on the other side of

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<sup>396</sup> Source: Anonymous (2011a), “Akermanis can still draw crowd”, *The Courier-Mail [Brisbane, Australia]*, 4 April, p. 63.

<sup>397</sup> Source: Schultz, W. and D. Schultz (2011), “Swans arrived at right moment”, Talkingpoint [Letters to the Editor], *The Courier-Mail [Brisbane, Australia]*, 26 January, p. 50.

Australia is an interesting one and it suggests innovative ways and approaches for tier-two clubs to carve out niche markets and brand-names for themselves which do not involve fighting head-on the hegemonic AFL clubs. The Foxtel Cup (2011-14) also offered some hope and extra meaning for second-tier clubs around Australia as players and supporters got to test themselves out on the national stage. However, the games should have been played at the clubs' traditional home grounds instead of as curtain-raisers to AFL matches. With the Foxtel Cup axed the only hope for forgotten traditional tier-two clubs now is a rebel competition outside the auspices and control of the AFL.

To return to the topic of ground redevelopment and rationalization, Subiaco Oval today is a fully corporatized ground, sold out to West Coast season-ticket holders for West Coast home games, and surrounded on all sides by homogeneous grandstands and the ubiquitous, horrible, plastic bucket seats. The once great traditional ground with the atmospheric, concrete terracing, so close to the play on the Roberts Road scoreboard wing, is now a hollow corporate shell and is completely distasteful for traditionalists. As the French philosopher Michel Foucault would have said, the corporate people aim to control, physically as well as psychologically, every aspect of a football supporter's game-day environs and experiences. They cannot understand that some people like to watch games from grandstands but others prefer either grassed banks or concrete terracing.

### ***The sad demise of State of Origin football in the post-West Coast era***

Of course, West Coast was always a football *club* and never a state team. You could see this in West Coast's first ever VFL home-and-away game against Richmond, on 29 March 1987, which I watched from the still extant concrete terracing on the scoreboard wing. Western Australians Michael Mitchell and Peter Wilson were playing in Richmond colours that day so how could West Coast be a state team? Such a hypothesis made no logical sense. I have always supported Western Australia, in interstate and State of Origin games, but have never supported West Coast in the VFL/AFL. Western Australian football fans did not seem to have the logical capacity to understand that West Coast was a *club* team and so attendances dropped off dramatically at State of Origin games, post-West Coast, as most Western Australians thought that these games had now become redundant. As Barker<sup>398</sup> comments: "[Ross] Glendinning knew that public fervour aroused by the State of Origin concept had now shifted to the VFL club side he captained".

This WA situation is unlike in Queensland where State of Origin rugby-league games between Queensland and New South Wales are more popular now than ever despite the fact that three Queensland-based clubs play each week in the Sydney-based NRL. For many Queensland pubs, the three State of Origin nights each season are amongst their biggest nights of the year for crowds and beer sales. I was at a small pub on the beach-front in Emu Park, 21 kilometres south of Yeppoon and 45 kilometres east of Rockhampton, for a State of Origin night in 2010 with my good mate Chris Tolliday. Although Emu Park is a small town (population 2,967 at the 2006 Census), the pub was packed with people in New South Wales and Queensland State of Origin replica playing jerseys and colours one hour before the kick-off. Fans of the two states were separated into different parts of the pub with, of course, the New South Wales section being the smaller. Tickets were being sold for a raffle which would give the winner and her / his friends a lounge sofa, located directly under the TV, to watch the game from and free food and drinks throughout the telecast. Even as early as one hour before the kick-off, insults were being exchanged across the bar with a Queensland

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<sup>398</sup> Barker, *Behind the Play*, p. 235.

fan shouting to the New South Wales section: “if you don’t like it here go home” and a New South Wales supporter replying promptly: “I’m going home tomorrow”.

The key point that I am making here is that people in Queensland *understand* that the Brisbane Broncos, Gold Coast Titans, and North Queensland Cowboys are *club* teams and only the Queensland origin team is a legitimate *state* team. Fans of rugby-league in Queensland support *both* club-based NRL fixtures *and* State of Origin games. People *understand* that these two experiences, club games and state games, are fundamentally different and never the twain shall meet. Rugby-league State of Origin Games (three per season) are held presently on Wednesday nights, to separate them from club fixtures, and to encourage a culture where people drift to the pubs after work to watch the games. It may be due to the remoteness of Western Australia that there seems to be this “either-or” mentality in relation to higher-level sport (the “we got the Eagles so we don’t need Origin football mentality”) rather than the “both-and” mentality of the eastern states (the “let’s watch them both, they each add something” mentality). When I was living in Perth I was very disappointed that State of Origin games, post-West Coast, no longer held anywhere near the same attraction and glamour that they had held in the mid-1980s.

However, perhaps, this comparison between rugby-league and Australian Rules Football State of Origin games is somewhat unfair as New South Wales and Queensland border each other geographically and there is more natural movement of people between the two states than between Western Australia and Victoria. This creates a more natural rivalry, based on issues outside football, which the rugby-league state teams merely tap into and exploit rather than create. However, the Origin games then provide a channel and an outlet for, and arguably also strengthen the pre-existing rivalry. After the Queensland floods of January 2011, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh gave a passionate speech proclaiming “we are Queenslanders” and referring to the indomitable fighting spirit of Queenslanders. The relevant section of Anna Bligh’s 13 January 2011 speech is reproduced here:

“As we weep for what we’ve lost. As we grieve for family and friends. As we contemplate the devastating loss and destruction all around us. As we confront the challenge of recovery, let’s remember who we are. We’re Queenslanders.

We hold a special place in the heart of the nation. We're the ones they breed tough, north of the border. We're the ones they knock down, and we get up again"<sup>399</sup>.

The back page of *The Courier-Mail* on 8 April 2011 cited Queenslander Origin player Sam Thaiday and summarized his views in three succinct but not inaccurate bullet-points: Queenslanders (a) have more Origin passion; (b) are better people; and (c) don't want to be Blues. The Sydney-born Thaiday's actual statement was as follows:

"I think we play different footy in Queensland. We are a lot more passionate about it. We are all good blokes – and I think people can see that and see the difference. Even the New South Welshmen want to be Queenslanders.

As you can see – and it is no surprise – there is [*sic*] a lot of blokes that would rather play for Queensland. It is that passion we have for our rugby league here in Queensland"<sup>400</sup>.

In the same day's sporting section in *The Courier-Mail*, the veteran Brisbane Broncos and Queensland Origin player Darren "Locky" Lockyer put forward his opinion that people who were born on one side of the border but played on the other side should be able to choose their Origin team based on the "passion" they felt for the respective teams. Lockyer says:

"Origin is about passion and pride and if you are not passionate about the team you are going to play for, then you probably shouldn't be there.

It is pretty simple – they either feel like they are a Blue or a Maroon"<sup>401</sup>.

It was only the second week in April 2011 and clearly the first shots of the year in the rugby-league Origin war had already been fired in earnest through the media. In general terms, Queensland is perceived to be more "hick" and "provincial", but also more "authentic" and "grounded", compared to the sophisticated and multicultural New South Wales so there is a real "city-country" or "capital-provincial city" fault-line here similar to that between London and Newcastle or between London and Portsmouth. Ever since the Joh Bjelke-Petersen era in Queensland, in

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<sup>399</sup> Anna Bligh, cited in Harvey, C. (2011), "Written into our history", *The Sunday Mail [Brisbane, Australia]*, 6 February, p. 9.

<sup>400</sup> Sam Thaiday cited in Dorries, B. (2011), "Stating the obvious", *The Courier-Mail [Brisbane, Australia]*, 8 April, p. 120.

<sup>401</sup> Darren Lockyer cited in Dorries, B. and S. Jancetic (2011), "Playing with passion: Locky says Origin hopefuls should follow their heart", *The Courier-Mail [Brisbane, Australia]*, 8 April, p. 115.

relation to which Melbourne band Skyhooks sang “I’ll get down to Coolangatta and I’m on my way” in the song “Over the Border”, Queensland has always been perceived as being very different (for better or worse) from the two mainland states to its south.

By contrast, the rivalry between Western Australia and Victoria was always more a *pure football-based rivalry* based on the VFL/AFL’s poaching of Western Australian players. Many Western Australian football people felt that the issue or fault-line underpinning the football-based rivalry between Western Australia and Victoria had been resolved (or if not resolved then at least re-channelled) because of the formation of West Coast. This alleged resolution of this contradiction is implied in the West Coast Eagles’ club song which states that “our Eagles have come home”.

The playing of State of Origin games on Tuesday afternoons in Perth, ordinary working-days, created a hype-factor in the mid-1980s, and the bubble had burst by 1989, since people will only be able to escape work and school commitments if there is some major community groundswell and sympathy for the match and for the people attending the match. A person cannot so easily skip work or school for a day for what the broader community perceives to be a minor match. The Tuesday afternoon time slot created additional hype around State of Origin games in Perth in the mid-1980s and this bubble eventually had to burst. However, the AFL football leadership must surely look at the financial and marketing success of the rugby-league State of Origin concept today and wish that they had re-invented Australian Rules Football Origin games rather than let them die which was, without doubt, the unimaginative course of least resistance. One wonders whether AFL CEOs really deserve their two-million dollar plus yearly salaries when you look at the State of Origin debacle and you compare the now non-existent State of Origin series in Aussie Rules with the mega-successful annual rugby-league event.

### ***Concluding comments***

I close this chapter and this book with reference to that ex-West Perth player of the 1980s, the Balga boy Dean Laidley. Laidley resigned as coach of AFL club North Melbourne on 16 June 2009 as, although he was a successful coach in the traditional mould, he could not or would not “sell” the club to sponsors as the new corporatized football world demanded. He is a figure of a bygone era and it is suitable to end this unashamedly traditionalist book with reference to him. Laidley is one of the few links between this chapter and the two which preceded it. A much younger Laidley was one of the players our cheer squad members watched and shouted for when he played for West Perth in 1984-85 and the Perth suburb of Balga also features significantly in this book. During 1984 or 1985, our friends from Chapters 3 and 4, P.A., Dave S., Thommo, and Robbie may well have encountered Laidley in the run-down and depressing suburban shopping-centre in Balga or at one of the suburb’s service stations or at the famous Brian Burke Reserve (home ground of the Balga Soccer Club whose heyday was also in the 1980s).

By the late-2000s, the humble Laidley, who consistently refused “corporate-speak” and always remained a Balga boy, was no longer perceived by the powerful football elite to be in step with the demands placed on senior team coaches by clubs and by the AFL in this era of corporate football. Likewise, as a traditionalist, I am pleased to say that I was there for the last Golden Era of the WAFL. Football will literally never be the same again.

This book is an attempt to preserve some of the memories, from both sides of the boundary fence, and transmit them, if only imperfectly, to the future generations who will be raised knowing only West Coast, Fremantle, and the AFL. As a traditional WAFL supporter, what can I say about West Coast? To take the words of the club’s song and cheekily alter its meaning: “For years they took the best of us and claimed them for their own”. However, the similarity to the song ends there because in this case “nobody is coming home” anymore from either of the Perth-based AFL clubs to the WAFL (with the exception of Peter Bell and a few other old diehards). Even John Worsfold and Glen Jakovich, names revered in Perth up until today, didn’t bother turning out to play one final

season with South Fremantle as a way of saying thank-you to the original WAFL club which ten years previously had been the springboard from which they launched their VFL/AFL careers. To those football people who continue to disrespect or ignore the traditional WAFL clubs and their histories I will leave them with a biblical reference: "give honour where honour is due". We should remember that our ancestors going back 115 years loved these clubs and poured their hearts and souls into them. Why should we forget them?



## **Appendix A**

### **Sub-gangs, West Perth Cheer Squad, 1984-86 (ages as at 1984)**

#### **The Booragoon sub-gang**

1 \*Kieran J., 15 years, Applecross Senior High School student (1984-85) then university student (1986)

2 \*Mike B., 16 years, Applecross Senior High School (1984-85) then occupation unknown (1986), school friend of Kieran

#### **The Carine sub-gang**

3 Courtney, 14 years, high-school student, junior football friend of Thommo

4 Rohan H., 14 years, high-school student, school friend of Courtney

#### **Floaters / non-aligned**

5 \*Mark T. aka "Thommo", 14 years, high-school student (1984-85), plasterer (1986); junior football friend of Courtney

6 \*Robbie, 14 years, joined cheer squad 1985, lived in Balga, took buses home with Balga sub-gang, knew Thommo before joining cheer squad, also in Balga sub-gang

#### **The Balga sub-gang**

7 \*\*P.A.", 18 years, lived in Balga, employment situation unknown

8 \*Dave S. (name changed), 16 years, lived in nearby Tuart Hill but took buses to games with P.A. and Robbie, school / employment situation unknown

#### **The C. brothers sub-gang**

9 \*Mike C., 16 years, in and out of reform homes

10 \*Robert C., 15 years, only went to games occasionally, had criminal record

11 \*Pete C., 14 years, in and out of reform homes

12 \*Female niece or cousin of the C. brothers, 4 years, attended 50% of games

#### **The Perth Modern SHS sub-gang**

13 Ben McA., 13-14 years, John XIII college student

14 Rob, 13-14 years old, Perth Modern SHS student, friend of Ben and Tony

15 Tony, 12-13 years, Perth Modern SHS student, school friend of Rob

16 Mario, 8-9 years, younger brother of Tony (also in younger members sub-gang)

#### **The younger members sub-gang**

17 Michael aka "Half", 8 years, parents were financial members of West Perth, no relationship to other cheer squad members, lived in Bayswater or Maylands

18 \*\*"Thommo Junior", 8 years, younger brother of Thommo

(\* denotes took public transport to and from games)

## **Appendix B – Selected West Perth match results, 1976-86**

### **Round 6, 1984 – West Perth v South Fremantle, Leederville Oval**

#### **Likely line-ups**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 5 May, 1984, p. 193)

West Perth FC

Backs: Dayman, Comerford, O'Brien

Half-backs: Hendriks, Mugavin, Morgan

Centres: Warwick, Perrin, Mifka

Half-forwards: Simms, Lockman, Gastevich

Forwards: Bell, Alderton, Bogunovich

Ruck: Nelson, Menaglio, Fong

Interchange from: Kickett, Michalczyk, Davis, D Falconer

South Fremantle FC

Backs: Barrett, Hayes, G Carter

Half-backs: Mosconi, Henworth, Cornell

Centres: Keyner, Hardie, Grljusich

Half-forwards: Michael, Dorotich, Vigona

Forwards: Matera, Mount, N Carter

Ruck: Edwards, Vasoli, Hart

Interchange from: Rawlinson, Gillica, Winmar, Amoroso

#### **Match results**

West Perth FC 3.5 6.8 11.15 15.15 (105) drew South Fremantle FC 3.4 8.7 9.7 16.7 (105)

Scorers: WP: Kickett 4.1, Davis 3.0, Gastevich 2.1, Simms 1.4, Lockman, Menaglio, Nelson 1.1, Fong, Perrin 1.0, Mifka 0.3, Michalczyk 0.1, Warwick 0.1, Forced 0.1.

SF: Hart 4.0, Winmar 3.1, Hardie, Matera 2.1, Dorotich 2.0, Edwards 1.3, Hayes 1.1, Vasoli 1.0, N Carter 0.1, Forced 0.1.

Best-on-ground rankings: B Perrin (WP) 1, W Mosconi (SF) 2, G Michalczyk (WP) 3.

Team rankings

WP: B Perrin 1, G Michalczyk 2, D Warwick 3, J Gastevich 4, P Mifka 5, D Kickett 6.

SF: W Mosconi 1, D Hart 2, B Hardie 3, W Matera 4, R Barrett 5, P Vasoli 6.

B Perrin: "Gave a brilliant ruck-roving performance. Had 18 kicks, took six marks and made nine handpasses".

W Mosconi: "Improved as the game progressed. Started on the half-back line, but played mainly on the ball and on a wing".

G Michalczyk: "In his first league match for five weeks, dominated the centre".

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 7 May, 1984, p. 81)

#### Match analysis

Quotes from DAVID MARSH:

"One of the first decisions made by Dennis Cometti after his appointment as West Perth's coach before the 1982 season was to promote West Australian junior players.

"This is paying dividends, as evident when five first-year men played leading roles in helping West Perth to rise from almost certain defeat.

(The five first-year players were: Derek Kickett from Tammin; John Morgan from Merredin; local juniors Ron Davis and Paul Mifka; and Brendon Bell from Karratha.)

Ron Davis "played superbly to kick the last two goals of the game from difficult angles in a forward pocket".

Brian Perrin is "one of the few Victorian players to excel in WA football in recent years.

"The former Footscray player [Perrin] gave a brilliant ruck-roving performance to continually set up attacking moves through sheer hard work.

"Stephen Michael [SF] played steadily without having a major influence on the game".

(Source: David Marsh (1984), "Cometti's plan is paying off", *The West Australian*, Monday, 7 May, p. 80)

### **Round 16, 1984 – East Perth v West Perth, Perth Oval**

This was the second close and exciting finish to West Perth versus East Perth “Perth derbies” during the 1984 home-and-away season. It is often said that Fremantle derbies are usually tough contests regardless of the positions of the two teams on the league ladder. The same could be said for Perth derbies. However, East Perth was in a rebuilding stage in 1984, like South Fremantle, and it only just made the finals series. Although West Perth was in the final-four after the loss in this Round 16 clash it finished the season badly and failed to make the finals. Following West Perth in the 1980s was a disheartening experience as the club often defeated leading teams only to lose games it should have won. In this game Les Fong and Peter Menaglio, as usual, were outstanding for West Perth. Both should be regarded as legendary names across the WAFL today but sadly that does not appear to be the case. Why not a “Les Fong-Robert Wiley” trophy for Perth versus West Perth games? It might make more sense than Stephen Michael-Barry Cable Cup (for Perth versus South Fremantle games) as at least Wiley and Fong actually played against each other and played the same position!

We note in this game West Perth coach Dennis Cometti again playing players out of position. Phil Bradmore was named at centre-half-back rather than in his customary centre-half-forward position while David Marsh’s match report suggests the workmanlike but hardly charismatic ex-Swan Districts defender Graeme Comerford played at centre-half-forward! Craig Nelson was named at centre-half-forward rather than in the ruck. The 1983 Sandover Medallist John Ironmonger remained with East Perth in 1984 and he dominated West Perth’s inexperienced ruckmen Stuart Crole and Ramsay Bogunovich. Craig Nelson does not appear to have played in the ruck although he was in the starting side according to Saturday’s *West Australian*. The surprise success of country recruit Kim Rogers in the ruck for West Perth in 1985 is one factor which contributed to the club’s finals appearance that year.

However, in this 1984 game, it was the type of game West Perth really should have won if it wanted to play finals football. East Perth was in the rebuilding stage but the club mixed new players with the remains of the 1978 premiership side very well and the club was very competitive in 1984 and never disgraced. In this East Perth team old-hands such as Grant Campbell, Stan Magro, Peter Spencer, and Wayne Otway (the

only remaining 1978 premiership player in the team that day) played alongside many exciting young players who would go on to have great careers in the VFL/AFL including Glenn Bartlett, Michael Christian, Richard Dennis (out injured for this game), and the one and only Alex Ishchenko.

The 1984 WAFL season was extremely tightly fought, few teams were uncompetitive, and few teams were far ahead of the pack. Only ten premiership points separated South Fremantle (second) from Claremont (seventh). Leader East Fremantle could hardly have claimed to have dominated the season with 11 wins and 5 losses and a percentage of 110.31% after Round 16. Only one club, South Fremantle, had a percentage exceeding 120% and only last-placed Perth had a percentage below 85% (but a still very respectable 82.16%). Claremont (seventh) had won 7 and lost 9. Even the struggling Demons had won 4 games by Round 16. It is to the credit of past and present WAFL administrators and club leaders that the competition was so evenly poised and it suggests the zoning system was working well at this point. The competition had eight strong, traditional, and well-supported clubs all playing out of their traditional home grounds. This is very unlike the present AFL where of the Victorian clubs only Geelong, Melbourne, and arguably Richmond still plays matches at the traditional home ground.

My 1984 season notes, written during the 1984 season, state:

"East Perth 19.15 d West Perth 18.17. Perth Oval. Michael [Blewett] lost lens at Claisebrook Station. Huge record cheer squad – talked to [West Perth coach Dennis] Cometti before the match. Timeclock wasn't working – thrilling last quarter. Great games by [John] Gastev and [Derek] Kickett" [underlining in original].

There was a large group of people in the West Perth cheer squad that day. It was a fine day and the team was playing the traditional rivals. I think that the cheer squad had its complete contingent of around 15 dedicated members there that day, plus the many hangers-on you would get at away games. It was a happy carnival-like atmosphere as most away games for the group were. Dennis Cometti talked to the group members from across the fence before the match. The group probably had around 10 to 15 red-and-blue flags. It was a "thrilling last quarter", I wrote in 1984, and the time clock was not working at this stage of the match. I listed John Gastev and Derek Kickett as West Perth's best two

players while David Marsh of *The West Australian* listed these two as third and fourth best respectively. The West Perth cheer squad members enjoyed the thrilling finish and we were not too distressed to lose the game. A large cheer squad group walked back through the old entrance (now gone) at the south-east corner of the ground and headed back to Claisebrook Station. My season notes record that the joint founder Mike B. lost his contact lens at Claisebrook Station after the match. Group members took a long time looking for it.

The whole group took up nearly one carriage on the city-bound train. At Perth station group members split up and the majority of the members went to take their various buses back to the northern suburbs. (This was before the building of the Clarkson train line.) Mike B. and I headed through the city streets to St George's Terrace to take the Number 105 bus to Booragoon, still holding one giant red-and-blue flag each. Mike and I often met the Perth and Claremont cheer squads in the city-centre in those days and everyone from all groups would exchange friendly greetings and match results much like the Victorian cheer squads of that era used to do at Flinders Street Station. This day in 1984 was a fantastic match in the best tradition of the WAFL Golden Era, played between two traditional rivals with a good atmosphere and on a lovely fine day. Our cheer squad then was one of the largest groups it ever managed to assemble. This day was probably the first when the cheer squad existed in mature form and it was one of its best days. I remember a great atmosphere of camaraderie among the group increased by Dennis Cometti exchanging a conversation with group members before the game. The large Aboriginal pro-East Perth family groups that used to sit under the big trees behind the southern-end goals gave the cheer squad absolutely no problems. Bassendean Oval in 1985 would not be quite so welcoming.

#### **Likely line-ups:**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 21 July, 1984, p. 189)

East Perth FC

Backs: Magro, Kohlmann, Christian

Half-backs: Fullarton, Bartlett, Sheldon

Centres: Carpenter, Blakely, Solin

Half-forwards: R Sparks, Campbell, D Morgan

Forwards: Ironmonger, Scott, Papotto  
Rucks: Ishchenko, Spencer, Otway  
Interchange: Cocker, Walsh  
In: R Sparks, Ishchenko, Magro, Walsh  
Out: K Sparks, Berry, Kavanagh, Dennis (ankle)  
West Perth FC  
Backs: Dayman, Hendriks, Comerford  
Half-backs: O'Brien, Bradmore, J Morgan  
Centres: Warwick, Michalczyk, Mifka  
Half-forwards: D Kickett, Nelson, Gastev  
Forwards: Bogunovich, Simms Davis  
Ruck: Crole, Menaglio, Fong  
Interchange: Bell, Mountain

Selections:

KEN CASELLAS: East Perth

DAVID MARSH: West Perth

GARY STOCKS: West Perth

ROBERT WAINWRIGHT: West Perth

TIM GOSSAGE: East Perth

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 21 July, 1984, p. 189)

**Match results** – Saturday 21 July, 1984, Perth Oval

East Perth FC 2.5 9.9 14.12 19.15 (129) d West Perth FC 1.5 7.9 12.12 18.17 (125)

Scorers: EP: R Sparks 4.2, Papotto 3.3, Campbell 3.0, Otway 2.1, Solin 2.0, Scott 1.4, Spencer 1.2, Blakely 1.1, Carpenter 1.0, Ironmonger 1.0, Morgan 0.1, Fullarton 0.1.

WP: D Simms 5.1, Kickett 4.3, Gastev 3.2, Fong 2.0, Hendriks 1.1, Nelson 1.1, Bradmore 1.1, Warwick 1.0, Menaglio 0.3, Comerford 0.3, Mifka 0.1, Forced 0.1.

Weather: Fine, moderate southerly breeze.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 July, 1984, p. 85)

Attendance: 8,505 (from WAFL Online)

Free kicks: EP: 9, 8, 5, 5 – 27.

WP: 11, 9, 11, 4 – 35.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 July, 1984, p. 85)

Best players:

1 John Ironmonger (EP) – Was a dominant ruckman throughout. Knocked the ball intelligently, marked strongly and used constructive handball.

2 Peter Menaglio (WP) – A strong and creative ruck-roving performance, with a particularly brilliant second half.

3 Russell Sparks (EP) – An enterprising performance on a half-forward flank where he continually set up attacking moves.

Team rankings:

EP: J Ironmonger 1, R Sparks 2, G Campbell 3, W Otway 4, M Blakely 5, D Morgan 6.

WP: P Menaglio 1, L Fong 2, J Gastev 3, D Kickett 4, P Bradmore 5, D Warwick 6.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 July, 1984, p. 85)

	Round 16	Table	WAFL	1984		
	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	%	Points
EAST FREM**	16	11	5	-	110.31	44
SOUTH FREM	16	9	6	1	122.46	38
SWAN DIST*	16	9	7	-	115.97	36
WEST PERTH	16	8	7	1	96.29	34
East Perth	16	8	8	-	89.18	32
Subiaco	16	7	9	-	97.30	28
Claremont	16	7	9	-	91.64	28
Perth	16	4	12	-	82.16	16

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 July, 1984, p. 85)

\*eventual 1984 WAFL premiers

\*\*eventual 1984 WAFL runners-up



Match analysis:

Quotes from DAVID MARSH:

“East Perth’s rush towards the 1984 final round [KJ note: echoes of 1978] gained momentum at Perth Oval on Saturday when they forced West Perth to stagger and then fall at the end of a contest that was survival of the fittest.

“East Perth, 10 points down late in the final quarter, recovered to win by four points – 19.15 to 18.17.

“It was a magnificent game in which the East Perth players, after appearing on the brink of being over-run by West Perth, showed tremendous character to fight back and snatch this thrilling victory.

“However, West Perth’s bid for success showed plenty of raw courage from a team which finished with only 15 fit men.

“West Perth lost veteran centreman George Michalczyk at the 12-minute mark of the first quarter with a dislocated shoulder, ruckman Ramsay Bogunovich at the six-minute mark of the second quarter with a knee injury, and centre-half-forward Graeme Comerford (elbow), full-back Geoff Hendriks (knee) and back-pocket player Wayne Dayman (ankle) [REST IN PEACE – the author] all carried injuries at the finish.

“Another shadow is over the club with brilliant half-forward Derek Kickett, Brian Perrin and John Morgan facing the tribunal tonight after being reported following separate incidents.

“It was not a happy day for West Perth. It was hard for them to accept the philosophy that the East Perth victory was what football needed to sustain more interest in which clubs will play in the 1984 final round.

“East Perth led 14.12 to 12.12 at three-quarter time, which stemmed from excellent ruck work from John Ironmonger, livewire roving from Wayne Otway and a dominant half-forward line of Russell Sparks, Grant Campbell and David Morgan.

“Strongly built Mark Blakely worked hard in the centre to instigate several forward thrusts for the home side and ruck-rover Peter Spencer played well in patches.

“West Perth’s two best players were ruck-rover Peter Menaglio and rover Les Fong, who covered tremendous ground and were chief kick-getters.

“Fong finished the game with 27 kicks and Menaglio had 22 (with 14 in the second half). They provided West Perth with momentum on the ball and to a certain extent helped to nullify Ironmonger’s dominance in the ruck.

*Kieran James*

“West Perth’s half-forward flankers John Gastev and [Derek] Kickett were outstanding.

“Dean Warwick and Paul Mifka showed pace on the wings and Doug Simms kicked West Perth’s first four and their sixth goals from full-forward”.

(Source: David Marsh (1984), “East Perth’s rush picks up”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 July, 1984, p. 84)

**1985 First Semi-final – Swan Districts v West Perth, Subiaco Oval.**

**Likely line-ups**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 31 August, 1985, p. 191)

**West Perth FC**

Backs: Munns, Comerford, Evans

Half-backs: Warwick, C Nelson, Mugavin

Centres: Mifka, Bell, D Bewick

Half-forwards: Murnane, Bradmore, Fong

Forwards: Chaplin, Stephens, Kickett

Ruck: Rogers, Laidley, C Bewick

Interchange: Gastev, A Nelson, N Fong, Turley

**Swan Districts FC**

Backs: Hetherington, Mullooly, Ware

Half-backs: Fogarty, Sartori, Skwirowski

Centres: Allen, Solin, Penny

Half-forwards: Hutton, Rance, Holmes

Forwards: Caton, Sidebottom, Kimberley

Ruck: Johns, Langsford, Taylor

Interchange: Ahmat, Holtzman, Outridge, Richardson, Maher

**Selections:**

GEOFF CHRISTIAN: Swan Districts

KEN CASELLAS: West Perth

DAVID MARSH: Swan Districts

GARY STOCKS: West Perth

TIM GOSSAGE: West Perth

MAL BROWN (PERTH COACH): Swan Districts

GRAHAM MOSS (CLAREMONT COACH): West Perth

**Rival coaches' predictions:**

MAL BROWN (PERTH COACH): "West Perth's biggest asset is their pace and Peter Menaglio will be a loss in that regard. In addition, Peter Murnane and George Michalczyk are under an injury cloud and that could see them struggle to maintain pressure midfield.

"If West Perth had all their little men fit I think they would win. But Swan Districts get players like Jon Fogarty, Kevin Taylor, Tom Mullooly and Joe Ahmat back for this game and that must give them a boost.

"On the other hand, West Perth have a lot of young players who will be playing in their first final. I think that who ever wins the game will play in the grand final".

GRAHAM MOSS (CLAREMONT COACH): "Swans have lost that bit of toughness which helped them cut out running players in recent years and I think they will have problems curbing the West Perth midfield players.

"Phil Bradmore has been in exceptional form at centre-half-forward and he complements the work of the smaller players.

"If West Perth have any problems they appear to be in defence where they will have to check players like Garry Sidebottom, Murray Rance and Brett Hutton [i.e. Brent Hutton].

"It will be important for Graeme Comerford and company to bring the ball to the ground and allow some of the smaller players to clear it.

"On their day West Perth are a very good side and if they get their tails up early they will be hard to beat. But I do not think they are as good as Subiaco or East Fremantle".

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 31 August, 1985, p. 191)

### Match results

Swan Districts FC 7.3 12.6 17.8 24.14 (158) d West Perth FC 4.3 9.7 14.8 19.12 (126)

Scorers: SD: Sidebottom 9.1, Taylor 5.2, Holmes 5.1, Caton 3.1, Allen 1.1, Rance 1.0, Langsford 0.2, Ahmat, Hetherington, Ware, Solin 0.1, Forced 0.2.

WP: Bradmore 4.1, Kickett 4.1, D Bewick 3.1, C Bewick, Fong 2.2, Murnane 2.0, Chaplin 1.0, Gastev 1.0, Mifka, E vans, Munns 0.1, Forced 0.2.

Official attendance: 26,508 (from WAFL Online).

Weather: Fine.

Team rankings GEOFF CHRISTIAN:

SD: G Sidebottom 1, W Skwirowski 2, B Kimberley 3, M Johns 4, K Taylor 5, A Solin 6.

WP: P Bradmore 1, R Munns 2, D Bewick 3, P Mifka 4, B Bell 5, C Bewick 6.

KEN CASELLAS

SD: M Johns 1, G Sidebottom 2, K Taylor 3, A Solin 4, D Holmes 5, W Skwirowski 6.

WP: P Bradmore 1, C Bewick 2, D Bewick 3, R Munns 4, P Mifka 5, D Laidley 6.

DAVID MARSH

SD: G Sidebottom 1, B Kimberley 2, K Taylor 3, W Skwirowski 4, A Solin 5, M Johns 6.

WP: P Bradmore 1, R Munns 2, D Bewick 3, P Mifka 4, B Bell 5, C Bewick 6.

GARY STOCKS

SD: G Sidebottom 1, B Kimberley 2, W Skwirowski 3, A Solin 4, D Holmes 5, M Johns 6

WP: P Bradmore 1, D Bewick 2, R Munns 3, P Mifka 4, C Bewick 5, B Bell 6.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday 2 September, 1985, p. 73)

Selected match statistics (*The West Australian*, Monday 2 September, 1985, p. 73):

SD: G Sidebottom 5 marks-14 kicks-2 effective handballs; A Solin 3-18-12; B Kimberley 5-19-9; K Taylor 3-15-11.

WP: P Bradmore 8-18-3; C Bewick 3-20-4; D Bewick 2-19-4; R Munns 8-16-12; P Mifka 6-17-5; K Rogers 1-0-2; L Fong 8-16-8; J Gastev 7-13-4; P Murnane 4-9-2; D Laidley 2-15-2.

Coach's Comment:

John Wynne (WP): "I don't think you can be pleased with a losing effort, but it does hold us in good stead for next year".

(Source: Gary Stocks (1985), "Disappointing end for Kim Rogers", *The West Australian*, Monday, 2 September, p. 72)

Garry Sidebottom Comment: "Kicking goals is my business, so when our other players work like they did today, it makes my job easier"

(Source: David Marsh (1985), "Sidey's personal goal", *The West Australian*, Monday, 2 September, p. 73)

Media quotes re Phil Bradmore's performance: "In Saturday's match against Swan Districts, Bradmore capped off his most successful season in league football with another outstanding performance at centre-half-forward.

“He almost single-handedly kept the Falcons in the game in the first three quarters and he finished with eight marks, 18 kicks and three effective handpasses – and a suspected broken hand”.

Bradmore’s game was the “best performance of his career”.

Bradmore “has developed into one of the game’s most colourful characters.”

(Source: Gary Stocks (1985), “Bradmore proves his point”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 2 September, p. 72)

#### Match analysis

Quotes from the late GEOFF CHRISTIAN:

“The performances in all three grades have left West Perth with a strong foundation from which to build their 1986 campaign.

“...it was to West Perth’s credit that they managed 19.12 and retained a chance of winning until early in the final quarter.

“The performance was a testimony to the Falcons’ spirit of 1985.

“Bradmore received a meagre tally of 14 [Sandover] medal votes, a classic case of where the work done by a player during a season was undervalued.

“West Perth held an edge across the centreline.

Bradmore was “the best man afield” in the opinion of some.

“[Darren] Bewick confirmed that he is one of the game’s most exciting first year players.

Ross Munns was the “least experienced defender” but “most effective”.

“Full-back [Graeme] Comerford battled gamely against the in-form Sidebottom who could do little, if anything wrong. In that mood Sidebottom would kick goals, no matter [who] the opponent [was].

(Source: Geoff Christian (1985), “Falcons are on the right track”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 2 September, p. 72)

## **Round 1, 1986 – Perth v West Perth, Lathlain Park**

### **Match results**

Perth FC 6.3 10.8 11.10 13.15 (93) drew West Perth FC 1.2 6.7 9.11 13.15 (93)

Scorers: P: Rea 5.7, Wiley 3.0, Ryder 2.4, Cousins, Spalding, Santostefano 1.0, Stasinowsky, Zaikos 0.1, Forced 0.2.

WP: D Bewick 3.4, Bradmore 3.2, Michalczyk 1.2, C Bewick, Fong, Kickett, Evans 1.1, Stockley, Warwick 1.0, Menaglio, Mifka, King 0.1.

Official attendance: 8,121 (from WAFL Online).

Weather: Fine.

### Best-on-ground rankings FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR AWARD

P Menaglio (WP) 5 votes, D Laidley (WP) 4 votes, R Wiley (P) 3 votes, M Rea (P) 2 votes, C Smith (P) 1 vote.

### Team rankings

P: R Wiley 1, M Rea 2, C Smith 3, M Watson 4, M Higgins 5, J Lucas 6.

WP: P Menaglio 1, D Laidley 2, P Bradmore 3, K Rogers 4, L Fong 5, G Michalczyk 6.

P Menaglio: "An outstanding display in the uncustomary role of half-back".

D Laidley: "Combined with Menaglio on the half-back line to thwart many Perth attacking moves".

R Wiley: "A hard-working display and was at his best when Perth needed him to claw their way back into the match".

M Rea: "Gave Perth an early lead with a brilliant first-half five-goal haul".

C Smith: "Given the difficult assignment of checking live-wire West Perth half-forward Derek Kickett and he did the job admirably".

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 31 March 1986, p. 68)

### Match analysis:

#### Quotes from GARY STOCKS:

"It became obvious on Saturday that Perth have improved this season.

"There is more depth to the club than there has been since 1978 when the Demons lost the grand final to East Perth.

Perth “unlucky not to win”, “opened in brilliant style” with Mick Rea “in superb touch at full-forward”. Wiley “asserted control midfield” in the first quarter. At the same time Jack Lucas “eliminated” WP centreman Darren Bewick.

“West Perth are widely regarded as league football’s most skilful team...

West Perth “force[d] their way into the match” through half-backs Laidley and Menaglio, captain Fong, ruck-rover Michalczyk, and centre-half-forward Bradmore.

“A pleasing aspect from Perth’s point of view was that they did not surrender when West Perth hit the front for the first time in the match at the 15-minutre mark of the last quarter”.

(Source: Gary Stocks (1986), “Smith gives Demons more grit”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 31 March, p. 68)



### **Round 13, 1986 – Claremont v West Perth, Claremont Oval**

This exciting match was won by West Perth at Claremont Oval after the Falcons withstood a last-minute Claremont surge. The last section of the last quarter of this thrilling game can be viewed on YouTube (search for “WAFL Claremont versus West Perth 1986”). It was a sunny day and Claremont Oval looked magnificent. Both teams of this era were complete with a battery of fast midfield running players and based on the two close games the two teams played in 1986 they were evenly matched. Claremont was third after this Round 13 game, two premiership points and percentage above West Perth and Perth who were level on fourth and fifth but with low percentages of 98 and 96. Both Claremont and West Perth should have made the final four from this position. However, Perth made an end-of-season surge (finishing third with an impressive 12 wins, 8 losses, and a draw) to make the final series while West Perth dropped out.

This season was surely one of potential unfulfilled for a talented West Perth side and, at the end of the last season before the VFL/AFL expanded into Western Australia, West Perth supporters were pretty much fed up with the club and ready to embrace something new. For most fans the new team was West Coast Eagles FC while for me it was Perth Italia Soccer Club. West Perth had lost the first semi-final in 1985 and fans expected continual improvement in 1986 in John Wynne’s second year as coach but unfortunately the team fizzled out without a whimper and more motivated and consistent teams reached the final series. An unexpected loss late in the season in Round 19 to a rebuilding South Fremantle (seventh in 1986) at Fremantle Oval was a bitter blow to West Perth fans that had grown angry with the mediocrity being displayed by the team. A huge 98-point defeat to eventual premiers Subiaco in the last qualifying game revealed the true state of West Perth’s progress and further revealed it had no moral right to play in the finals. West Perth ended the last year of the pre-West Coast era in a mud heap of mediocrity and broken dreams, much like a washed-out LA hooker just stepped out from a Poison or Mötley Crüe song (to name two popular glam rock bands of the era).

The team line-ups reveal that the Claremont team of this year was a patchwork quilt of older legends, players from other clubs or back from

interstate, and some promising youngsters. Coach Graham Moss did extremely well to bring them to an eventual fourth position for 1986 after a first semi-final defeat at the hands of Perth. The listed back-line featured the tough and reliable Larry Kickett in one pocket (recruited from East Perth) while Geoff Miles (the ex-Collingwood player later to star at West Coast) was at full back. The half-back line was made up of talented youngsters with brothers Michael and David O'Connell (both early West Coast players) at centre-half-back and centre-half-forward respectively. The centre-line was dependable and talented, with Darrell Panizza on one wing (before he departed for SANFL club Woodville), captain Steve Malaxos (back from a failed year at Hawthorn) in the centre, and the brilliant Peter Davidson on the other wing. This was a state football standard or VFL/AFL standard centre-line. Ex-West Perth player Derek Kickett was listed on a half-forward flank. Unable to maintain a good working relationship with John Wynne, after Dennis Cometti had left West Perth, Derek sadly for West Perth fans moved to Claremont to join his cousin Larry. This was a major loss to West Perth and greater efforts should have been made to retain this player. By himself he could make the difference between a club playing finals football or just missing out. Another fine running player Steve Goulding was named as ruck-rover for CFC with the young David Court being given the first ruck responsibilities now Graham Moss was no longer operating as a playing-coach.

On paper the ruckmen appeared to be Claremont's biggest weakness but David Court surprised by winning the ruck contest and being named as Claremont's second-best player. Court's dominance here perhaps makes it surprising that he never really went on to have a successful career as a footballer. The tough and under-rated ex-East Perth full-forward John Scott was named at full-forward. Despite no longer being in the first flame of youth, he was still respected and feared by West Perth fans as he had put in some great performances against mediocre West Perth defences (are there any other type?) in past Perth derbies. Scott was a good mark and was very agile and nimble for his height, being able to weave around backmen and pick up the ball from the ground and inside packs. He had that typical East Perth spirit even after he left the club.

The West Perth line-up for this game is also a revelation simply because the club had made very few changes of playing personnel since the previous year. In hindsight, this proved West Perth's ultimate fatal weakness because it trod water in 1986 while the other clubs, most notably Perth, improved dramatically. If as a West Perth fan you had not attended any West Perth game in 1986 but then attended this Round 13 match, you would find you still had the luxury of knowing nearly all the players! To WPFC's advantage, promising juniors such as Dean Laidley, Dean Warwick, Paul Mifka, and Craig Turley were all now a year older, more experienced, and more self-confident (as was John Gastev who was injured for this game). Phil Bradmore, Les Fong, and Peter Menaglio were still in the prime of their careers and all played well this game except for Fong who was largely tagged into ineffectiveness. Bradmore was voted best-on-ground and defeated three Claremont players including future West Coast champion Geoff Miles. His win over Miles suggests he was good enough to play VFL/AFL and was perhaps unfairly overlooked by West Coast and other VFL clubs at the end of the 1986 season. His earlier brief career at Footscray was apparently either ignored or held against him. *The West Australian* for Monday, 23 June 1986 describes Bradmore's performance as follows: "Strong and creative at centre-half-forward where he had 16 kicks and scored four goals". Brendon Bell was a reliable, talented, and somewhat physical midfield player for West Perth in the 1980s and another of those WPFC players of the era who was hugely under-rated. He played a great game this day and was nominated second best for his club after Bradmore. The fact that his name was misspelled by *The West Australian* as "Brendan" when the correct spelling was "Brendon" (see Brian Atkinson's club history book) does suggest he was flying well and truly under-the-radar as far as the media was concerned. Another good WPFC performer this day was another relative no-name David Martin in defence. The fact that Ross Munns was now in the starting line-up and not on the bench or in the reserves, unlike most of the previous two seasons, does suggest the club was running out of options. Among the few positive factors for the club in 1986 were the returns of Peter Murnane and Corry Bewick but only Bewick was in the best players' list for this game. Bradmore, Bewick, and Fong were the only WPFC players

in the Top 20 players for the WA Footballer of the Year Award after Round 13 (see below).

It appeared this day that David Court won the ruck duels overall but WPFC's makeshift ruck brigade of Dan Foley, Mal Bennett, and the often injured Craig Nelson put up a reasonable performance. Clearly the team missed Kim Rogers, the strong lead ruckman from the 1985 season, who was still at the club but must have been out injured. Renato Dintinosante was an effective tagger of Les Fong but Bell, C Bewick, and Menaglio were all still outstanding in the midfield. John Scott was effective for CFC with 6.3 but Derek Kickett and Steve Goulding were woefully inaccurate with 1.6 and 1.5 respectively. (The match-report in *The West Australian* on the following Monday credits Goulding with 1.5 but the scores in the same newspaper credit him with 1.4.) Scott's 6.3 took him to equal first on the goal kicking table with 49 goals after Round 13, equal to Mick Rea (Perth). Peter Davidson played an outstanding game as did Steve Malaxos. Malaxos received a knee injury when tackled late after having kicked Claremont's 10<sup>th</sup> goal midway through the third term, and WPFC came back into the game after this point. To quote the match-report written by the late Geoff Christian: "West Perth kicked the last four goals of the third term (plus the first three in the last) in a seven-goal burst that took their score from 8.7 to 15.12 during which Claremont managed only three points". Christian also wrote: "West Perth were fading at the finish but strong at the start of the [last] quarter when they kicked three early goals and held Claremont scoreless for 11 minutes to establish a 24-point lead, 15.12 to 10.18". Ultimately, Claremont was not able to bridge this lead at the end although it came very close. WPFC showed it could beat Claremont during the 1986 season but if we take the season as a whole then clearly Claremont was by far the better performer as the final percentages of the two teams after 21 rounds (110% and 88%) make clear.

**Likely line-ups:**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 21 June 1986, p. 203)

**Claremont FC**

Backs: L Kickett, Miles, Dintinosante

Half-backs: Morton, M O'Connell, Brayshaw

Centres: Panizza, Malaxos, Davidson

Half-forwards: D Kickett, D O'Connell, Shepherd

Forwards: Beers, Scott, Hann

Ruck: Court, Goulding, Mitchell

Interchange (from): Tait, Owens, Park, Begovich

### **West Perth FC**

Backs: Munns, Mugavin, Lill

Half-backs: Laidley, Martin, Binder

Centres: Mifka, Warwick, D Bewick

Half-forwards: Turley, Bradmore, Bell

Forwards: Menaglio, Nelson, Murnane

Ruck: Foley, L Fong, C Bewick

Interchange: Bennett, Bushe-Jones

In: Laidley, Bennett, Murnane

Out: Barns (groin), Gastev (groin), Stephens

### **Match results – Saturday 21 June, 1986, Claremont Oval**

West Perth FC 3.1 8.4 12.11 16.13 (109) d Claremont FC 4.7 6.12 10.18 13.26 (104)

Scorers: WP: Nelson 4.3, Bradmore 4.1, Foley 2.3, Murnane 2.0, C Bewick 1.2, Lill 1.1, Bell 1.0, D Bewick 1.0, Menaglio 0.2, Mifka 0.1.

C: Scott 6.3, Mitchell 2.1, D Kickett 1.6, Goulding 1.4, Owens 1.3, Malaxos 1.0, Beers 0.3, Hann 0.1, M O'Connell 0.1, Morton 0.1, Shepherd 0.1, Forced 0.2. [KJ note: One Claremont goal seems to be missing from this list.]

Weather: Fine, moderate north-easterly breeze.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

Attendance: 8,807 (from WAFL Online)

Free kicks: WP: 6, 7, 5, 2 – 20.

C: 6, 10, 3, 6 – 25.

Best players:

WA Footballer of the Year Award:

5 votes Phil Bradmore (West Perth) – Strong and creative at centre-half-forward where he had 16 kicks and scored four goals.

4 votes Peter Davidson (Claremont) – Another typical hard-working and effective centreline performance, during which he had 22 kicks and 10 handpasses.

3 votes Brendon Bell (West Perth) – Busy and effective as a half-back and then in the centre in a performance that heralded his return to top form. [KJ note: The newspaper misspelt this player's name as Brendan Bell.]

2 votes David Court (Claremont) – A sustained four-quarter effort in the ruck where he was a dominant player at the hit-outs.

1 vote David Martin (West Perth) – Was in control throughout at centre-half-back where he exerted a stabilising influence on the West Perth defence.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

Team rankings: WP: P Bradmore 1, B Bell 2, D Martin 3, P Menaglio 4, D Foley 5, C Bewick 6.

C: P Davidson 1, D Court 2, J Scott 3, D Kickett 4, S Goulding 5, S Malaxos 6.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

WA Footballer of the Year Award Leaders after Round 13 (Top 20 players):

33 votes – Laurie Keene (S)

30 votes - Brian Peake (EF)

29 votes – Steve Malaxos (C)

25 votes – Peter Featherby (S)

21 votes – Peter Sartori (SD), Brian Taylor (S)

20 votes – Peter Davidson (C)

18 votes – Phil Bradmore (WP)

17 votes – Warren Dean (S), Robert Wiley (P)

16 votes – Corry Bewick (WP), Mark Bairstow (SF)

15 votes – Craig Starcevich (EP)

14 votes – Steve Goulding (C), Darrell Panizza (C), Peter Wilson (EF), Neil Taylor (S)

13 votes – Michael Mitchell (C), Chris Mainwaring (EF), Les Fong (WP)

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

	Round 13	WAFL	Table	1986		
	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	%	Points
SUBIACO*	13	12	1	-	149.52	48
EAST FREM**	13	9	4	-	125.49	36
CLAREMONT	13	8	5	-	136.52	32
WEST PERTH	13	7	5	1	98.20	30
Perth	13	7	5	1	96.08	30
Swan Dist	13	3	10	-	87.08	12
South Frem	13	3	10	-	66.73	12
East Perth	13	2	11	-	73.81	8

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

\*eventual 1986 WAFL premiers

\*\*eventual 1986 WAFL runners-up

Leading goal-kickers after Round 13 (Top 9 players):

49 – Mick Rea (P), John Scott (C)

44 – Stephen Sells (S)

41 - Tony Buhagiar (EF)

40 – Colin Waterson (EF)

37 – Warren Dean (S)

36 - Brian Peake (EF)

32 – Todd Breman (S), Wayne Ryder (P)

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

Complete match report (full text):

By the late GEOFF CHRISTIAN:

“West Perth delved deep into their bag of last-quarter tricks at 4.35pm at Claremont Oval on Saturday and came up with a new way to frustrate, and then beat, Claremont.

“West Perth changed the formula they used at Leederville Oval on May 10 when they produced a surging finish, coming from 41 points down at the 10-minute mark of the last quarter to win by three points.

“This time West Perth were fading at the finish but strong at the start of the quarter when they kicked three early goals and held Claremont scoreless for 11 minutes to establish a 24-point lead, 15.12 to 10.18.

“That proved enough to frustrate the Tigers, who kicked a wasteful 3.8 to 1.2 for the remainder of the game to finish five-point losers at the end of a game they were desperate to win.

“The turning point in this game for West Perth came midway through the third quarter. The precise moment was when Claremont captain Steve Malaxos received a knee injury when tackled late after having kicked Claremont’s 10<sup>th</sup> goal to give the side a 20-point lead.

“That was Malaxos’s last kick of the game and it also marked the high point of Claremont’s afternoon of football.

“West Perth kicked the last four goals of the third term (plus the first three in the last) in a seven-goal burst that took their score from 8.7 to 15.12 during which Claremont managed only three points.

“Malaxos was Claremont’s best player for 21/2 quarters and he looked the man likely to develop into a match-winner.



"But the title was eventually the property of West Perth centre-half-forward Phil Bradmore who was again superb as a key attacking player despite the attention of Michael O'Connell, Noel Morton and later Geoff Miles.

"Bradmore not only provided four goals but also a reliable avenue into attack that Claremont were unable to achieve at centre-half-forward.

"Claremont were blocked at that position by an excellent performance from David Martin, a Tigers reject, who had one of his finest days in football in a winning battle against David O'Connell.

"Claremont full-forward John Scott (6.3) set a standard of efficiency in the Claremont attack that was not followed by either Derek Kickett (1.6) or ruck-rover Steven Goulding (1.5). [KJ note: The match scores on the same page of the newspaper credit Goulding with 1.4.]

"Kickett could not convert a notable winning effort against Dean Laidley in the air and on the ground into goals and Goulding spoiled a strong midfield effort with goalfrost inefficiency.

"The exit of Malaxos from the ground made things easier for West Perth inside the centre-square, notably Brendan Bell, who was in superb form in the third quarter when he had six kicks, a mark and five hand-passes in a performance that helped the Falcons offset the influence of Claremont winger Peter Davidson, who ended up as his team's best player.

"The combined efforts of rover Corry Bewick and Peter Menaglio were critical to the West Perth victory.

"It was essential for West Perth to win the roving battles against Michael Mitchell and Mark Hahn on a day when Claremont ruckman David Court won the majority of the hit-outs and Claremont's Renato Dintinosante successfully tagged Falcons' captain Les Fong restricting him to 11 kicks and two hand-passes.

"Corry Bewick enhanced his reputation for consistency and Menaglio was back at near his best a week after his return to league ranks against South Fremantle.

"Mitchell played spasmodically but he continues to attempt to achieve too much in a single burst. Quicker disposal could only help himself and Claremont's all-round football.

"West Perth appeared to have solved their big-man problems.

"This has been achieved by using Dan Foley as a ruckman, regaining the services of Mal Bennett as a knock ruckman and Craig Nelson's return to form and fitness.

*Kieran James*

“Bennett showed on Saturday that he is a capable player at the hit-outs and in the marking duels, Foley again displayed impressive around-the-ground talent and Nelson’s confidence is back where it belongs”.

(Source: Geoff Christian (1986), “A new trick from the Falcons’ bag”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 23 June 1986, p. 100)

### **Round 19, 1986 – South Fremantle v West Perth, Fremantle Oval**

This Round 19 match at Fremantle Oval was a match West Perth really had to win to secure a final four position, as David Marsh wrote in his match preview in *The West Australian* on the morning of the game (see below for the full-text of Marsh's match preview). On paper it did not look a difficult proposition for West Perth to win as the club was sitting on 8 wins, 9 losses, and a draw, with percentage of 89%, compared to South Fremantle's 5 wins, 13 losses, and 72%. If West Perth could not win a game against a rival with such a track record then obviously it had little hope of ending the year successfully even if it did scrape into the final-four. South Fremantle was in a rebuilding year with the few older players still hanging around from the premiership year of 1980, such as Benny Vigona, entering their twilight years.

One interesting development of the last two years of the WAFL prior to introduction of West Coast Eagles was the surprising resurgence of depleted East Perth and South Fremantle sides which were then, by necessity as much as by choice, filling their senior teams with promising youngsters. These young players had not yet begun to make a huge impression on the scoreboard with these two clubs finishing sixth and seventh in 1986. However, both clubs contained large numbers of promising juniors who would go on to forge successful VFL/AFL careers. This shows the magnificent ability of the WAFL clubs, even at this late stage of the game (one year prior to formation of West Coast), to recreate themselves successfully from within during down years by turning to talented juniors from the country and metropolitan zones. A read through the selected teams of both East Perth and South Fremantle in 1986 shows what great talents were emerging. As David Marsh wrote, SFFC had begun the season extremely poorly but slowly the young team had begun to gel and pick up its self-confidence, playing with the enthusiasm of youth mixed with that indomitable bulldog spirit. Marsh wrote that South Fremantle had inflicted surprise mid-season defeats upon the eventual premier Subiaco and the eventual third-placed team Perth. South had won 2 and lost 3 since Round 13. Another factor counting against West Perth this day was its bad record at Fremantle Oval, traditionally a graveyard for WPFC teams. Marsh wrote that the Falcons had not won at this windswept ground in eight years prior to this match. This means that even in 1982 when West Perth had finished third

and in 1985 when West Perth had finished fourth it had been unable to win against South at South's home ground. Because of these factors, West Perth fans who headed to Fremantle Oval this day in 1986 found it hard to push aside feelings of dread and foreboding.

If we look at South Fremantle's nominated team, we can see it included a number of brilliant young players who would go on to achieve great success in the VFL/AFL. Starting from the back line and working forward, this included Peter Sumich at centre-half-back (a first-year player); Mark Bairstow in the centre (a second-year player); Neil "Nicky" Winmar on the half-forward flank (a fourth-year player); John Worsfold as ruck-rover (a first-year player); and Wally Matera as first rover (a fifth-year player). Other players who would not play VFL/AFL but who had great years at Fremantle Oval included Brad Collard on the left wing (a third-year player); Matt Sambrailo at full-forward (a first-year player); Derek Collard in the forward pocket / second rover (a second-year player); and the 1989 Sandover Medallist Craig Edwards as first ruckman (a third-year player). This would have been the beginnings of a new dynasty for South Fremantle had the VFL/AFL not intervened and picked all the best talent out of the side.

By contrast, the West Perth team was largely unchanged from the previous year but just a little older. It had some juniors coming through but not in the same numbers and not with the same quality as those at the port club. West Perth's best young players included John Gastev, Sean King, Dean Laidley, Paul Mifka, and Craig Turley, all of whom later played for West Coast. Another promising young player was Darren Bewick, probably the best of the lot, but his great success at Essendon probably surprised many who had watched him play in the WAFL. His elder brother Corry returned to West Perth in 1986 and he was one of the best and most consistent players for the club that year. Claremont player Simon Lill was really the only recruit of note to come from another WAFL club in 1986. The East Fremantle premiership player Gavin Wake was a sensational recruit for West Perth in 1987 but his impact was lost in the year when most football fans had turned their attentions from the WAFL to West Coast Eagles. If Wake had come over a year earlier it might have made a big difference as that type of toughness is hard to come by at West Perth (except for ruckmen) and has always had to be imported.

Like the 1985 first semi-final (West Perth versus Swan Districts) this was a demoralizing game to watch for WPFC fans as the result was never in doubt and the club was just overshadowed and outplayed in pretty much all positions without being completely disgraced. West Perth trailed 21.12 to 10.9 at three-quarter time and the game was obviously completely over. I remember sitting and watching this game with my friend 16-year-old Pete C. on the concrete terraces on the scoreboard wing at around the half-forward flank position at the city-end of the ground. Pete C. and I were the only remnants remaining of the West Perth cheer squad which had sat behind the northern-end goals at Leederville Oval during 1984-85. The group had gradually disintegrated from its peak of 15-20 regulars starting in Round 2 of the 1986 season as people just naturally drifted apart due to life changes and with no-one making the mental effort anymore to keep the group together. I only met Pete by chance this day. Both Pete and I were wearing our usual clothes of long-sleeve replica West Perth jumpers and jeans. We had a good time chatting as we hadn't seen each other for a few months. Pete's elder brother Mike was nowhere to be seen.

After all the atmosphere and pressure had left the game in the last quarter, West Perth kicked six goals to three but still only managed to close the gap to 55 points. WPFC was now in fifth place, six premierships points adrift of Claremont, and with two games remaining. Most supporters wrote off the club's chances of reaching the finals series after this game. The top five players on the ground were all South Fremantle players, according to Monday's *The West Australian*. These included promising youngsters Wally Matera, Mark Bairstow, and Peter Sumich (this day at centre-half-back), and the more experienced hands Craig Edwards (enjoying his life at Fremantle Oval more than his days as a Royal) and Warren Mosconi (who had made his league debut as long ago as 1981).

The late Geoff Christian in his match report (full-text reproduced below) remarked that there was so much young talent at South Fremantle that aging veterans Benny Vigona and Willie Roe had played in the reserves. Obviously they hadn't been needed. Christian made the important observation that while South had many brilliant individual players on this day it was their "bulldog spirit" that West Perth just had no hope of matching anywhere south-west of Leederville Oval. Christian

wrote in his match report as follows: "South had plenty of other individual stars but it were more the spirit and the team co-operation revealed by this young Bulldogs' line-up that West Perth found impossible to match for all but the opening 12 minutes". Neil Winmar (still not yet called "Nicky" by the press) was mentioned in closing by Christian for his excellent 17-kick, 4-goal effort in the centre which did not even grant him a spot in his team's best five players. He had been named on the half-forward flank so even at this young age he was beginning to show his remarkable versatility. Other good players for the Southerners were Matt Sambrailo (5.1) at full-forward and Ross Hutcheson at centre-half-forward. Best players for West Perth were John Gastev, Craig Nelson, Craig Binder, Les Fong, Craig Turley, and Corry Bewick. Surprisingly, one of the best West Perth players in the past three seasons, centre-half-forward Phil Bradmore, was well held by Peter Sumich. Christian stated that Sumich was "a first year player who started the season in attack but looked admirably suited at centre-half-back".

South had left its run too late and could not play finals although clearly it was now playing football at finals' standards. By contrast, West Perth showed everybody at the ground that it was far away from being of final round standard even if by good fortune it might just sneak into fourth place. Its recruits were not as good as those at other clubs and its dedication was not what it should have been. The club was relying too much on the heroes of the past few years (such as Phil Bradmore, Les Fong, and Peter Menaglio), and while Corry Bewick had played well all year his advancing age meant he was never going to be anything more than a stopgap. Noel Mugavin was a dependable old warhorse at full-back but he was basically just the last one left standing of the old-guard full-back line which had included at various times Graeme Comerford, Bill Duckworth, John Duckworth, Russell Ellen, Geoff Hendriks, Ray Holden, Ben Jager, and Mick O'Brien.

The club had failed to recruit strong new key attacking players (to replace Rod Alderton and Brian Adamson and in time Phil Bradmore) nor had it recruited new key defenders (to replace Graeme Comerford, John Duckworth, Geoff Hendriks, Ray Holden, and Noel Mugavin). The fact that the ex-West Perth player Mick Rea had morphed into an excellent full-forward at Perth and was leading the goalkicking list with 80 majors after 19 rounds was particularly irksome for West Perth fans.

The WPFC coach John Wynne seemed to lack the ability to consistently bring the best out of former second-string players as Mal Brown was now doing at Perth with Mick Rea. Too many good players had been allowed to slip through the net including not only Mick Rea but also David Hart (South Fremantle) and Derek Kickett (Claremont). The juniors coming through were all running midfielders, a type of player West Perth traditionally had an abundance of. West Perth had no tall juniors who could play in key positions coming through whereas South had Craig Edwards, Matt Sambrailo, and Peter Sumich. No West Perth player this day scored more than three goals. (John Gastev kicked 3.2.) In the Round 13 win over Claremont no West Perth player had kicked more than four goals. These statistics tell an important story.

The absence of any West Perth players in the best five players' list shows that on the day it was completely outclassed both as individuals and as a unit. The youngsters at the club were too inconsistent and too easily intimidated at hostile away grounds such as Fremantle Oval. The only young players in West Perth's best six players' list were John Gastev and Craig Turley. Clearly, Dean Laidley (out with an ankle injury) was sorely missed but I would not be foolish enough to suggest that his presence might have influenced the result.

#### **Likely line-ups:**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 9 August 1986, p. 187)

South Fremantle FC

Backs: Macdonald, Carter, Maskos

Half-backs: D Wilson, Sumich, Mosconi

Centres: B Collard, Bairstow, Lynch

Half-forwards: Winmar, Hutcheson, Todd

Forwards: Bennett, M Sambrailo, D Collard

Ruck: Edwards, Worsfold, Matera

Interchange: Lockhart, Sims

West Perth FC

Backs: Munns, Mugavin, Barns

Half-backs: Binder, Mifka, Turley

Centres: D Bewick, Bell, King

Half-forwards: Menaglio, Bradmore, Lill

Forwards: Waddell, Foley, Gastev

Ruck: Nelson, Fong, C Bewick

Interchange: Collinge, Martin

In: Waddell, Collinge, Martin

Out: Laidley (ankle), Chaplin (ankle), Bennett

#### Match preview

By David Marsh:

“Today is D-Day – do-or-die – for West Perth, who have their last chance to stake a claim for a berth in this year’s finals.

“And they could not have a tougher assignment, as they meet giant-killers South Fremantle at Fremantle Oval.

“South have had victories over Subiaco and Perth in the past three weeks. In addition, West Perth have not won at Fremantle Oval for eight years”.

#### **Match results** – Saturday, 9 August, 1986, Fremantle Oval

South Fremantle FC 7.5 16.10 21.12 24.18 (162) d West Perth FC 3.5 6.6 10.9 16.11 (107)

Scorers: SF: Edwards 5.3, Matt Sambrailo 5.1, Winmar 4.2, Matera 4.1, D Collard, Bairstow 2.2, Hutcheson, Todd 1.0, B Collard 0.2, Worsfold, Lockhart 0.1, Forced 0.3.

WP: Gastev 3.2, Bradmore 2.1, Fong, King, D Bewick 2.0, C Bewick, Collinge 1.2, Foley, C Nelson 1.1, Menaglio, Lill 0.1. [KJ note: One WP goal seems to be missing from this list.]

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 101)

Weather: Fine, light south-westerly breeze.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 101)

Attendance: 5,872 (from WAFL Online)

Free-kicks: SF: 7, 4, 4, 3 – 18.

WP: 4, 5, 4, 1 – 14.

Best players:

WA Footballer of the Year Award:



5 votes Wally Matera (South Fremantle) – A brilliant 22-kick, four-goal display of roving.

4 votes Mark Bairstow (South Fremantle) – Another strong, creative performance at centre where he was under notice from the start.

3 votes Craig Edwards (South Fremantle) – A quality performance in the ruck and when resting in attack. Marked brilliantly and kicked four goals.

2 votes Warren Mosconi (South Fremantle) – A dashing and effective half-back who was outstanding in a solid South defence.

1 vote Peter Sumich (South Fremantle) – A notable performance at centre-half-back against Phil Bradmore.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 100)

Team rankings: SF: W Matera 1, M Bairstow 2, C Edwards 3, W Mosconi 4, P Sumich 5, D Collard 6.

WP: J Gastev 1, C Nelson 2, C Binder 3, L Fong 4, C Turley 5, C Bewick 6.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 100)

	Round 19	WAFL	Table	1986		
	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	%	Points
SUBIACO*	19	15	4	-	134.56	60
EAST FREM**	19	14	5	-	132.29	56
PERTH	19	12	6	1	105.06	50
CLAREMONT	19	10	9	-	119.01	40
West Perth	19	8	10	1	89.54	34
South Frem	19	6	13	-	72.80	24
Swan Dist	19	5	14	-	86.09	20
East Perth	19	5	14	-	82.24	20

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 101)

\*eventual 1986 WAFL premiers

\*\*eventual 1986 WAFL runners-up

Leading goal-kickers after Round 19 (Top 9 players):

80 – Mick Rea (P)

71 – John Scott (C)

55 – Warren Dean (S), Stephen Sells (S), Colin Waterson (EF)

53 – Brian Peake (EF)

48 – Wayne Ryder (P), Craig Edwards (SF)

41 – Tony Buhagiar (EF)

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 101)

Complete match report (full-text):

By the late GEOFF CHRISTIAN:

"South Fremantle are at the start of a bright [new] era in league football based on an excellent mix of raw talent and enthusiasm, blended with the right amount of experience.

"That formula was the basis of South's scintillating 55-point win over West Perth at Fremantle Oval on Saturday, a victory full of merit and one that should help guarantee that the season ends a lot happier than it started for the Bulldogs.

"An indication of the amount of ability available at Fremantle Oval these days can be gauged by the fact that gifted veterans Benny Vigona and Willie Roe were in action in the reserves on Saturday.

"The absence of these brilliant attacking players obviously did not hamper South who kicked their season's highest score [of] 24.18 and almost kicked the Falcons out of business.

"West Perth arrived at Fremantle Oval on Saturday knowing that victory was a stepping stone into the final four. It was not an easy task on an oval where the ground surface is obviously a big advantage for the home team.

"The Falcons left four hours later without even touching that stepping stone and failed miserably to measure up to the challenge laid down by South.

"The victory was built around superb performances by No. 1 rover Wally Matera (their smallest player), ruckman Craig Edwards (their biggest player) and centreman Mark Bairstow, who fitted neatly in the middle.

"[Wally] Matera has not given a better display of his roving skills. His work at the fall of the ball was classical in style and he made few, if any, handling errors.

“Edwards’ marking and general ruck play was superb and the same could be said of Bairstow whose powerful work in the middle was of the quality West Perth wished they had available to them.

“South had plenty of other individual stars but it was more the spirit and the team co-operation revealed by this young Bulldogs’ line-up that West Perth found impossible to match for all but the opening 12 minutes.

“Everywhere West Perth turned on Saturday they found trouble. On a day dedicated to national dental health week, West Perth simply bit off more than they could chew. They lacked the bite of the Bulldogs; there was [sic] too many gaps in their play and too many weak spots that obviously were tender to the probe.

“It was not a day when centre-half-forward Phil Bradmore could lead the Falcons out of trouble. He was well held by Peter Sumich, a first year player who started the season in attack but looked admirably suited at centre-half-back.

“There was plenty of defensive support for Sumich, mainly from Warren Mosconi, Gavin Carter and Arthur Maskos.

“Things were no better in defence for West Perth.

“Matt Sambrailo, who started the year for South on a wing, showed natural flair at full-forward when he kicked 5.1 and Barry Hutcheson has the look of a man who knows how to play at centre-half-forward.

“And to add to the woes of the West Perth defence, Neil Winmar [later “Nicky” Winmar] decided to show how well he can play at centre with a 17-kick, four-goal effort”.

(Source: Geoff Christian (1986), “Bulldogs find a formula for success”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 11 August 1986, p. 100)

### **Round 21, 1986 – Subiaco v West Perth, Subiaco Oval**

Readers may be wondering why I include this game as a “classic match” here in this book / WAFL Golden Era website when Subiaco defeated West Perth by 98 points. I define “classic” to include not only close and exciting games but also games which are somehow representative of a season or an era for one or both competing teams and/or for the league. This game proved how devastatingly brilliant the Subiaco team of 1986 was – the last truly great team of the WAFL’s Golden Era which ended with the formation of West Coast Eagles FC. On its home ground, Subiaco literally dismantled piece by piece a West Perth team which had had final four aspirations at the start of the game. In the end, the game was little more than a training run for the home team and master-coach Haydn Bunton Junior used it to trial a new forward set-up with Todd Broman at full-forward. Geoff Christian wrote a long and detailed match report of this game (full-text is reproduced below) primarily because the match had vital significance for the coming final round where Subiaco was due to play its only serious challenger for the premiership Ron Alexander’s East Fremantle in the second semi-final.

Subiaco’s nominated team (see below) shows what a strong team Haydn Bunton had managed to assemble since he took over the perpetual cellar-dwellers at the start of the 1984 season. It included the perfect blend of youth and experience; a first-rate ruck led by the giant Laurie Keene and the reliable Phil Scott (both of whom could kick goals in the forward line); the best forward-line seen in the WAFL since the Claremont team of the early-1980s which had featured Warren Ralph, Steve Malaxos, and Jim and Phil Krakouer; and some fast-running, aggressive, and competent defenders including Clinton Brown (a vast improver), Michael Crutchfield, Phil Lamb, and Mark Zanotti. Experience was provided by the ever loyal rover Neil Taylor (one of the few players left over from the failed years in the second-half of the 1970s and the early-1980s) and the brilliant Peter Featherby, back from his time at Footscray and Geelong but still performing at very close to his VFL/AFL standard. In this game Featherby dominated the midfield (a traditional area of strength for West Perth in the 1970s and 1980s) with 31 kicks. He was nominated as second-best Subiaco player on the ground behind Todd Broman.

The highlight of this game for the fans must have been watching the brilliance of a Subiaco team which lost the end-of-season challenge game to Hawthorn by only two points and was clearly a VFL/AFL standard team. Up forward Bunton in this game experimented with Breman at full-forward who kicked 10.1, the first double-figure goals tally since the days of Austin Robertson in the 1960s. Geoff Christian even claimed that Breman's fast and efficient leading and his drop-punt accuracy reminded him of Robertson. As an indication of the new depth at Subiaco, Breman had played at full-forward in the reserves in the Round 1 game against East Fremantle. Furthermore, Laurie Keene had demonstrated his undoubted class as a full-forward with nine goals against Swan Districts in April 1985 but Bunton enjoyed the luxury this day of changing the ruckman Keene and Scott through the back-pocket. Centre-half-forward Warren Dean (later to play with distinction for Melbourne) kicked 4.5 whilst the very handy VFA/VFL pick-up the unobtrusive Stephen Sells added 4.4 from the forward pocket. Phil Lamb and Laurie Keene were the other best players nominated from Subiaco to gain votes from this game in the WA Footballer of the Year Award. Phil Lamb was a reliable and hard-working player and loyal team-man. Like Neil Taylor, he managed to improve his skills and maintain a place in the starting 18 even in the years of Bunton's super-team. Both players clearly enjoyed being able to play in such a great side after years of being part of a club which had become the joke of Western Australian football after years when it had found it difficult to manage as many as six wins a season. As well as his 1986 premiership medallion, Taylor deserved another medal for enduring so many lean years at Subiaco which in his case stretched back as far as 1975. It was players like these two which the inaugural West Coast Eagles FC team lacked in 1987 with the Eagles' initial squad being heavily biased towards fashionable young players under the age of 24 years. Laurie Keene, simply because of his great height, revolutionized ruck play in WA football with the days of ruckman of 183-185 cm tall (six-foot to six-foot-one) such as South Fremantle's Stephen Michael effectively coming to an end around this time. (Michael perhaps is not a good example to illustrate this point since during his playing years he had a huge leap which allowed him to compete at centre bounce downs against much taller players such as Ron Boucher and Graham Moss, as well as West Perth's Ben Jager and

Russell Ellen. I did not watch enough Subiaco versus South Fremantle games in the early-1980s to knowledgeably comment but surely Michael must have struggled against a ruckman as tall as Keene.)

Only centre-man Dean Laidley out of the West Perth players rated in the best five men on the ground. He performed brilliantly to achieve a second best-on-ground rating in a team which lost by 98 points. Again we can see this game as indicative of the era, with Laidley's talent being spotted by the West Coast Eagles. He was among five West Perth players chosen in the West Coast squad, and all of these five were youth. West Perth was comprehensively outplayed and defeated, morally as much as in any other way. Ever since the premiership year of 1975, West Perth's strength had been its running midfielders and its weaknesses had been its key-position forwards and defenders, and its ruckmen. This trend continued with West Perth's defenders being comprehensively defeated by Subiaco's potent forward-line. Christian noted that the Subiaco forwards would be put under much more pressure by East Fremantle defenders such as Shane Ellis and Michael "Monkey" Brennan in the second semi-final.

By 1986 (although not in 1984) the WAFL had become somewhat predictable. As a journalist of the time said, Subiaco and East Fremantle were by far the best teams in 1986 with Perth far below these two but far ahead of fourth-placed Claremont. The dominance of Subiaco and East Fremantle can be seen from their respective win-loss records of 17-4 and 16-5. Ominously, for all other clubs, both these teams won their last two games of the 1986 season. The gap between the top two teams and fourth-placed Claremont was clearly evident from East Fremantle's stunning Round 21 win over Claremont at Claremont Oval where the port-based team won 27.14 (176) to 13.11 (89). As Christian pointed out in a second article on the Monday following Round 21 (see quote below), Perth and Claremont lost by a combined 123 points on the Saturday. Perth lost to a fast improving East Perth 21.21 (147) to 16.15 (111) at home at Lathlain Park, a loss which must have been extremely frustrating and worrying for Perth FC fans on the eve of the finals. The only hope for Perth fans of course was that their club's first semi-final opponent Claremont was performing equally poorly. Perth in fact lost the last two games of the season but was still sitting comfortably in third place after Round 21. Only a few Perth fans dared to hope that now,

under one Malcolm Gregory Brown, the club might win its first premiership since 1977.

Returning to the West Perth team, it appears that the team was beaten in every position on the ground including the centreline and ruck-roving, the team's strongest areas in the 1970s and 1980s. Christian wrote enthusiastically about Peter Featherby's 31 kicks in the centre and the winning efforts of rovers Neil Taylor and Glen O'Loughlin and ruck-rover Dwayne Lamb. Laurie Keene and Phil Scott won the ruck contests against Dan Foley and Craig Nelson. Kim Rogers, the best West Perth ruckman of 1985-86, was again not playing due to injury. He was sorely missed. Games like these made one realize West Perth had depended very heavily on Phil Bradmore, Les Fong, and Peter Menaglio for success (especially in the 1985 season when the team had made the finals). With these three star players all either beaten comprehensively (Bradmore and Fong) or not playing ("Saint Peter" Menaglio), West Perth was not at all competitive. Bradmore needed to dominate at centre-half-forward and kick a barrel of goals himself for West Perth to win a match against strong opposition. In this game he was well held and ended up kicking only 1.1. Running players Corry Bewick (WPFC's star "recruit" for 1986) and Les Fong just crept into West Perth's best players' list at number five and number six. The loss of Menaglio and other 1980s players such as David Palm and Peter Murnane were keenly felt by West Perth with the tiny Les Fong even being named as ruck-rover for this game. Other strong performers in 1986 such as Brendon Bell and Darren Bewick obviously were simply swept aside in the Subiaco onslaught. As I have written elsewhere on this website, WPFC had failed to satisfactorily plug holes in its defence caused by the exits of Graeme Comerford, John Duckworth, Geoff Hendriks, and Mick O'Brien. Noel Mugavin was now the full-back but he was simply the last one to retire of the old workhorses and at 30-years-of-age in 1986 he was not a good bet for the future. In the forward line the situation was as bad or even worse with no key-position players coming through to replace Rod Alderton and Brian Adamson (who last played in 1984) and Doug Simms (who last played in 1985). One or two new key-position forwards had been desperately needed to compliment Phil Bradmore. During 1986 the team played with no recognized full-forward and it was rare for any one player to score more than three goals per game. In this

match Craig Nelson scored 3.1 (certainly far from the Laurie Keene class in front of goals despite the optimism of those at the club) and no other player scored more than two.

The main problem at West Perth in 1986 was simply hubris and overconfidence from the administration, coach, and players. No recruits of note were added to the team from interstate or other clubs in 1986 and the juniors coming through were not of the quantity or quality to match clubs such as East Perth and South Fremantle (as can be seen from West Perth's Round 19 loss to South Fremantle at Fremantle Oval). The dark years of 1990-92, when WPFC was last three years in a row, were coming up and I believe that 1986 marked the beginning of the downhill slide. The club was partly right to argue that its inner-city recruiting areas were drying up fast but *this does not mean it should have ever left Leederville Oval*. Like Subiaco has done, it should have just claimed new recruitment areas in the far northern suburbs while keeping its traditional home ground. Supporters were extremely disappointed that the club could not improve on its fourth placing of 1985. The main reasons were injuries and a failure to recruit any name new recruits from interstate or other clubs. Meanwhile, WPFC fans had to endure the sight of Derek Kickett performing brilliantly at Claremont; David Hart succeeding as a rover at South Fremantle; and even Mick Rea against all the odds securing a second lease of life under Mal Brown at Perth and topping the season's goal-kicking. All of these were ex-West Perth players and players who should have been retained. Further afield, Ross Gibbs achieved dual premiership medallions with Glenelg in the strong pre-Adelaide Crows SANFL competition of 1985-86 and David Palm was exceeding all expectations in the centre position for Richmond (proving himself worthy of continuing the line of brilliant Richmond centre-men from the recent past such as Geoff Raines and the late Maurice Rioli).

However, it may well be that West Perth simply did not put in the required effort or play with sufficient enthusiasm. This is hypothesis rather than fact. I did not attend this game. Christian made a somewhat strange comment in his match report which is difficult to interpret as follows: "But there was only enough fuel on board to maintain a luke-warm challenge after the initial burst of energy had been burnt up". What exactly did he mean when he said West Perth did "not have enough fuel



on board”? Was he politely hinting at a lack of effort and enthusiasm? West Perth lost every quarter and nearly every position on the field. West Perth was given a final chance to make the final four in this game. Christian correctly wrote that the team gave the supporters not a glimmer of hope. David Marsh had claimed in *The West Australian* that the Round 19 loss to South Fremantle was the make-or-break game and yet West Perth’s Round 20 win over Claremont gave them yet another chance to make the final four. With an East Fremantle victory over Claremont fairly likely in Round 21, even at Claremont Oval, West Perth only had to beat Subiaco (and Claremont lose) for West Perth to scrape into the final four by two premiership points. The fact that a place in the final four was still up for grabs should have meant West Perth had sufficient motivation in this Round 21 match. Why did WPFC capitulate so badly in this game and at the tail end of the 1986 season? This is one of the key questions posed by the events of the dying days of the last WAFL season prior to the West Coast Eagles’ era (during which 90% of Western Australian football fans would no longer find such questions remotely interesting any longer). What was John Wynne’s relationship with the players like this late in the 1986 season? Wynne did not continue on in 1987. Overall, West Perth’s disappointing end to the 1986 season was a huge blow to the fans and was one reason why our 20-member cheer squad of 1984-85 fell apart as the year progressed.

Subiaco’s 1985-86 team proved itself to be one of the greatest WAFL teams produced in any era and the club could have won three premierships in a row to equal the achievement of Swan Districts in 1982-84 had the advent of the VFL/AFL not ripped the heart out of the team. As has been written elsewhere, Bunton and the club produced an amazing feat to win the 1988 premiership after so many devastating player losses had been sustained, and Todd Breman was a key element in that second premiership win. Sadly, the Bunton era fizzled out rather than ended with a bang as most Western Australian football fans devoted their attention primarily to the VFL/AFL competition after the formation of West Coast Eagles. Bunton’s achievement at Subiaco was every bit as great as the achievement of John Todd at Swan Districts. It was not Bunton’s fault that he lost over half of his starting 20 at the end of the 1986 season.

**Likely line-ups:**

(Source: *The West Australian*, Saturday, 23 August 1986, p. 203)

**Subiaco FC**

Backs: Dawson, Brown, Crutchfield

Half-backs: P Lamb, Wilkinson, Sparks

Centres: Carpenter, Featherby, Dargie

Half-forwards: MacNish, Dean, Langdon

Forwards: O'Loughlin, Breman, Sells

Ruck: Keene, D Lamb, N Taylor

Interchange: Scott, Georgiades

In: Featherby, Crutchfield

Out: Willet, Zanotti

**West Perth FC**

Backs: Martin, Mugavin, Munns

Half-backs: Binder, Barns, Bell

Centres: D Bewick, Laidley, King

Half-forwards: Gastev, Bradmore, Warwick

Forwards: Nelson, Sadowski, Chaplin

Ruck: Foley, L Fong, C Bewick

Interchange: Collinge, Lill

In: Barns

Out: Mifka (jaw)

**Match results - Saturday, 23 August, 1986, Subiaco Oval**

Subiaco FC 4.5 13.9 22.14 27.17 (179) d West Perth FC 2.2 6.7 9.7 12.9 (81)

Scorers: S: Breman 10.1, Sells 4.5, Dean 4.4, Georgiades, MacNish 2.1, Langdon 1.2, P Lamb, Featherby 1.1, Scott, N Taylor 1.0, Keene 0.1.

WP: Nelson 3.1, Foley 2.1, Fong 2.0, Chaplin 1.2, Bradmore, Gastev, C Bewick 1.1, King 1.0, Lill 0.1, Forced 0.1.

Weather: Fine, light south-westerly breeze.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, p. 96)

Attendance: 9,916 (from WAFL online)

Free kicks: S: 9, 5, 6, 4 – 24.

WP: 5, 8, 6, 6 – 25.

Best players:

WA Footballer of the Year Award:

5 votes Todd Breman (Subiaco) – An immaculate 10-goal performance at full-forward where he gave an outstanding exhibition of straight and long kicking.

4 votes Dean Laidley (West Perth) – Battled hard, long and spiritedly in his team's losing cause. Was continually under notice in the midfield.

3 votes Peter Featherby (Subiaco) – Another [conspicuous] performance in the middle. Had 31 kicks in a composed display of skill and stamina.

2 votes Phil Lamb (Subiaco) – Was prominent early on a half-back flank and then went to a wing where he continued in strong, hard-working form.

1 vote Laurie Keene (Subiaco) – Was the dominant ruckman. Wound up his best season in league football with another excellent all-round performance.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, p. 96)

Team rankings: S: T Breman 1, P Featherby 2, P Lamb 3, L Keene 4, D Lamb 5, M Crutchfield 6.

WP: D Laidley 1, D Foley 2, C Barns 3, R Munns 4, C Bewick 5, L Fong 6.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, p. 96)

Other Round 21 results:

South Fremantle 21.16 (142) d Swan Districts 12.12 (84), Fremantle Oval

East Perth 21.21 (147) d Perth 16.15 (111), Lathlain Park

East Fremantle 27.14 (176) d Claremont 13.11 (89), Claremont Oval

	Round 21	WAFL	Table	1986		
	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	%	Points
SUBIACO*	21	17	4	-	140.26	68
EAST FREM**	21	16	5	-	139.43	64
PERTH	21	12	8	1	98.77	50
CLAREMONT	21	10	11	-	110.44	40
West Perth	21	9	11	1	88.69	38
East Perth	21	7	14	-	87.10	28
South Frem	21	7	14	-	74.93	28
Swan Dist	19	5	16	-	82.87	20

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, p. 96)

\*eventual 1986 WAFL premiers

\*\*eventual 1986 WAFL runners-up

Leading goal-kickers after Round 21 (Top 9 players):

80 – Mick Rea (P)

72 – John Scott (C)

66 – Stephen Sells (S)

63 – Colin Waterson (EF)

57 – Brian Peake (EF)

52 – Warren Dean (S), Craig Edwards (SF)

50 – Wayne Ryder (P)

46 – Tony Buhagiar (EF)

Complete match report (full text):

By the late GEOFF CHRISTIAN:

“Subiaco coach Haydn Bunton’s continuing and imaginative search for the perfect goalkicking formula broke new ground on Saturday when he used Warren Dean, Todd Berman and Stephen Sells in close order across the full-forward line against West Perth at Subiaco Oval.

“This variation on the theme produced a formidable tally of 18.10, a major contribution to the 98-point victory on a day when Subiaco completed their preparation for the second semi-final by kicking 27.17 – their third-highest score of the season.

“To use Breman, Dean and Sells in concert as an attacking unit, Bunton deployed first-year players John Georgiades and Karl Langdon as half-forwards and made no use whatsoever of the considerable goal-kicking skills of ruckman Laurie Keene who was rested in defence.

“A year ago, Keene was Subiaco’s No. 1 goalkicker but he was not missed in attack on Saturday as Breman (10.1), Sells (4.5) and Dean (4.4) went on a goalscoring spree for which West Perth had neither the required individual ability nor the overall defensive technique to counter.

“It was 21 weeks ago that Breman was the full-forward in the reserves against East Fremantle on the opening day of the season when he scored six goals and first drew attention to his potential as a goal scorer.

“That potential now has been confirmed after Breman gave the best goalkicking performance for Subiaco since Keene kicked 9.0 against Swan Districts on April 27 last year. It was the first double-figure tally for the Lions since the days of Austin Robertson.

“Robertson had no greater admirer as a full-forward than Bunton. And there were features of Breman’s display on Saturday that were strongly reminiscent of Subiaco’s former master of the goalkicking art.

“Breman’s ultra-fast and well-timed leads were pure Robertson and so was his accuracy with the drop punt, though he has the capacity to kick longer (and sometimes longer than required) – but with less concentration.

“And Subiaco showed a willingness and impressive ability to get the ball to a man who has arrived at full-forward this year via the half-back flank and the wing – an unusual and circuitous route.

“This was an impeccable display from Breman, though he can expect far closer and tougher attention in the second semi-final than he received on Saturday.

“[Warren] Dean, Subiaco’s irregular centre-half-forward, played like a man coming back to form and maybe to centre-half-forward, though his kicking lacked the precision he achieved mid-season.

“[Stephen] Sells, unorthodox, unpredictable and unreliable on Saturday when kicking

for goal inside the square, again revealed his uncanny and refreshing knack of ending up with the difficult ball.

“When Keene dominates the ruck, centreman Peter Featherby has 31 kicks, rovers Neil Taylor and Glen O’Loughlin come back to form and ruck-rover Dwayne Lamb is a winner, Subiaco’s forward[s] are apt not to lack opportunity.

“And when the defence, led by full-back Clinton Brown and the dashing half-backs Michael Crutchfield and Mark Zanotti, plays with authority the opposition finds it hard to score.

“That is how it worked out for West Perth, who failed to come to grips with the competitive challenge on Saturday and did not give their fans a hope of victory and the opportunity of qualifying for the first semi-final.

“Centreman Dean Laidley set the standard for spirit, perseverance and performance in this West Perth team that started full of spirit in the first 20min. But there was only enough fuel on board to maintain a luke-warm challenge after the initial burst of energy had been burnt up.

“West Perth were too spasmodic on the ball and their team play suffered badly in the face of fast, effective and frequent Subiaco tackling”.

(Source: Geoff Christian (1986), “Lions thrive on new tactic in attack”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, p. 96)

Second article by GEOFF CHRISTIAN (selected quote):

“Claremont and Perth lost by a combined margin of 123 points on Saturday, hardly the type of form required to produce an inspiring [first] semi-final clash” (page 96).

(Source: Geoff Christian (1986), “Perth likely to recall Stasinowsky”, *The West Australian*, Monday, 25 August 1986, pp. 96, 100)

## **Appendix C**

### **My West Perth FC all-stars teams**

#### **1977-84 best team (compiled in 1984)**

Backs: Bill Duckworth, Ray Holden, Ross Gibbs

Half-backs: Ross Prunster, Geoff Hendriks, Shane Fitzsimmons

Centres: Peter Murnane, Mel Whinnen (vice-capt.), Stuart Hiller

Half-forwards: David Palm, Brian Adamson, Barry Day

Forwards: Bill Valli, Rod Alderton, Craig Nelson

Ruck: Ben Jager, Peter Menaglio, Les Fong (capt.)

Interchange: Alan Watling, Dean Warwick, George Michalczyk

Coach: Graham Campbell

Home ground: Leederville Oval!!

#### **1985 best team (compiled in 1985)**

Backs: Wayne Dayman, Graeme Comerford, Neale Fong

Half-backs: Brian Perrin, Geoff Hendriks, Dean Laidley

Centres: Peter Murnane, Brendon Bell, Paul Mifka

Half-forwards: Derek Kickett, Phil Bradmore, Les Fong (capt.)

Forwards: Gavin Chaplin, Mark Stephens., Darren Bewick

Ruck: Kim Rogers, Peter Menaglio, Corry Bewick

Interchange: George Michalczyk, John Gastev, John Duckworth

Coach: John Wynne

Home ground: Leederville Oval!!

## Appendix D

### Sandover Medal and Footballer of the Year results, 1984-86

#### 1984 Sandover Medal Count Night, Perth Entertainment Centre

**Final Results:** Steve Malaxos (Claremont) - 17 votes; Michael Mitchell (Claremont) - 17 votes; Peter Spencer (East Perth) – 17 votes; Laurie Keene (Subiaco) – 14 votes; Peter Menaglio (West Perth) – 14 votes

All West Perth FC vote-getters: Paul Mifka – 9 votes; Brian Perrin – 8 votes; Dean Warwick – 7 votes; Les Fong – 6 votes; Wayne Dayman, Doug Simms – 3 votes; Graeme Comerford, John Gastevich, Derek Kickett, Craig Nelson – 2 votes; Phil Bradmore – 1 vote.

Some media quotes:

“The most disappointing feature of West Perth’s voting was that captain Les Fong, who set a consistent standard throughout the year, polled only six votes” – Geoff Christian.

“The umpires’ voting reflected the general opinion that West Perth wingman Paul Mifka was the best first-year player in league football” - Geoff Christian.

(Source: Geoff Christian, “Three-Way Tie for the Sandover”, *The West Australian*, Wednesday 29 August 1984, p. 127)

#### 1985 Sandover Medal Count, Golden Ballroom at Sheraton Perth Hotel

**Final Results:** Murray Wrensted (East Fremantle) – 46 votes; Michael Mitchell (Claremont) – 34 votes; Peter Davidson (Claremont) – 33 votes; Mark Bairstow (South Fremantle) – 33 votes; Dwayne Lamb (Subiaco) – 32 votes; David Bain (East Perth) – 30 votes.

All West Perth FC vote-getters: Dean Laidley – 25 votes (11<sup>th</sup> place); Kim Rogers – 23 votes (equal 12<sup>th</sup> place); Gavin Chaplin – 21 votes; Phil Bradmore, Peter Menaglio – 14 votes; Corry Bewick, George Michalczyk – 11 votes; Darren Bewick – 10 votes; John Gastev – 9 votes; Brendon Bell – 6 votes; Graeme Comerford, Doug Simms, Wayne Dayman, Les Fong – 5 votes; Derek Kickett, Peter Cutler, Brian Perrin – 4 votes; Paul Mifka, Dean Warwick – 3 votes; Peter Murnane, Tony Fraser 2 votes.

Team totals (5-4-3-2-1 voting system): East Fremantle 222; West Perth 186; Subiaco 182; Claremont 146; South Fremantle 140; Perth 137; Swan Districts 131; East Perth 116.



(Source: Geoff Christian (1985c), "A birthday Sandover for Wrensted", *The West Australian*, Tuesday, 27 August, p. 96)

### **1986 Sandover Medal Count, Golden Ballroom at Sheraton Perth Hotel**

**Final Results:** Mark Bairstow (South Fremantle) – 39 votes; Brian Taylor (Subiaco) – 36 votes; Paul Harding (East Fremantle) – 34 votes; Laurie Keene (Subiaco) – 32 votes; Robert Wiley (Perth) – 32 votes; Peter Wilson (East Fremantle) – 30 votes.

All West Perth FC vote getters [unbelievably no WP player was in the Top 24 places]: Les Fong – 14 votes; Dean Laidley, Dan Foley – 13 votes; John Gastev – 11 votes; Peter Menaglio, Ross Munns, Brendon Bell – 8 votes; Phil Bradmore, Craig Nelson – 7 votes; Corry Bewick – 6 votes; Peter Murnane – 4 votes; Kim Rogers, Simon Lill, Darren Bewick 3 votes; Dean Warwick, Sean King – 2 votes.

Team totals (5-4-3-2-1 voting system): Subiaco 212; East Fremantle 202; Perth 173; Claremont 158; East Perth 143; South Fremantle 129; West Perth 128; Swan Districts 115.

(Source: Geoff Christian (1986b), "Bairstow's Sandover in a count thriller", Tuesday, 16 September, pp. 87-88)

Notes by the author: 1. The Count Night was held in 1986 in the week prior to the Grand Final rather than in the week prior to the first semi-final.

2. Although Swan Districts finished eighth out of the then eight WAFL clubs in 1986, two Swans' players scored more votes than West Perth's top vote-getter Les Fong. These two players were: Peter Sartori with 25 votes and Kevin Taylor with 15 votes. Geoff Christian did not comment about the low number of votes polled by West Perth players.

### **1986 WA Footballer of the Year Award**

**Final Results:** Laurie Keene (S) – 45 votes; Paul Harding (EF) – 37 votes; Peter Sartori (37 votes); Mark Bairstow (SF) – 34 votes; R Wiley (P) – 33 votes; P Featherby (S) – 32 votes; B Peake (EF) – 31 votes; Steve Malaxos (C) – 29 votes; B Taylor (S) – 28 votes; S Goulding (C) – 24 votes; C Bewick (WP) – 24 votes; W Matera (SF) – 23 votes; C Starceвич (EP) – 22 votes; P Wilson (EF) – 22 votes; D Panizza (C) – 20 votes; N Taylor (S) – 19 votes; P Bradmore (WP) – 18 votes; M O'Connell (C) – 17 votes; W Dean (S) – 17 votes; A Montgomery (P) – 17 votes; A

Ischenko (EP) – 16 votes; M Watson (P) – 16 votes; D Laidley (WP) – 16 votes; L Fong (WP) – 25 votes; S Da Rui (EP) – 14 votes; G Neesham (EF) – 14 votes; D Rankin (EF) – 14 votes; M Mitchell (C) – 13 votes; C Mainwaring (EF) – 13 votes; M Wrensted (EF) – 13 votes; J Santostefano (P) – 13 votes; D Holmes (SD) – 13 votes; J Worsfold (SF) – 13 votes; B Cousins (P) – 12 votes; D Langsford (SD) – 12 votes; D Lamb (S) – 12 votes; B Yorgey (P) – 11 votes; P Mifka (WP) – 11 votes; R Dennis (EP) – 10 votes; C Edwards (SF) – 10 votes; K Taylor (SD) – 10 votes.

All remaining West Perth FC vote getters: D Foley – 9 votes; P Menaglio – 8 votes; S King, C Barnes 6 votes; B Bell, D Warwick – 5 votes; J Gastev – 4 votes; C Nelson, D Bewick 3 votes; D Martin 1 vote.

(Source: *The West Australian*, Monday, 28 August, 1986)

*Kieran James*